

LEADING LATIN@ YOUNG ADULTS TOWARD LIFE VISION
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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Submitted to
New York Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

New York, New York, USA

2013

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ABSTRACT

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As a pastor serving youth and young Adults for over 20 years and an executive member of the Latino Leadership Circle in NYC, an organization dedicated to the empowerment of Latin@ young adults, I have observed an emptiness of purpose among this important group in our congregations. Significant numbers of them lack any notion of what they are to do with their lives. There is no drive passion to pursue dreams and aspirations. They allow for life to “just happen” with no sense belief that they are gifted to live significant and fulfilling lives here on earth. Many young adults have not understood the promise of *abundant life* offered by Jesus. They lack *Life Vision*. Life Vision is a God given passion and direction for our life. This lack of Life Vision has a crippling effect on their future and the vitality of the church, in particular the Latin@ church in the United States. This demonstration project will present the factors that lead to aimlessness among emerging Latin@s. It will address the social and spiritual dimensions of this challenge, bring awareness and present a transformational framework that will assist local congregations in addressing this mindset of aimlessness. It will present a comprehensive strategy that will infuse life and will offer direction to this key group in our congregation.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother Miguelina Alvarez who faithfully opened doors in my life so that I could believe in the dreams that God had for me. “Te amo mucho mami” (I love you very much, mom).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my team: Rosa Delgado, Noemi Rodriguez, Daniel Sanabria, Rev. Jose Humphreys, and Maria Vellon. I am also grateful to the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God, particularly, Rev. Rafael Reyes, Superintendent, Rev. Virginia Maldonado, Director of Education and Rev. Eddie Zaldana, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries for their partnership. I would like to acknowledge Dr. Pablo Diaz for sharing his valuable work of Latino/a Self Esteem with me. My advisor Dr. Efrain Agosto gave me valuable direction and was extremely helpful in the last phases of my dissertation. Lastly, very special thanks go to my wife, Alicia Alvarez who was also part of my site team and without which I could not have finished this work (“LUL”).

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INTRODUCTION

Since my childhood I have been a dreamer. My imagination would take me around the world and through the galaxies. This probably accounts for my attraction to science fiction. I'm particularly fascinated when science fiction becomes science fact. When NASA first launched its first shuttle and called it the "Enterprise" in 1976, I was at the edge of my seat. I saw the promise of going "where no person had gone before." More recently, technological advances have brought us hand held devices that allow us to see and hear each other. I must confess that I have been on those long lines waiting for the next big thing. I love to see an idea come to pass. I am without a doubt a Dominican-American Techno-Nerd. My appreciation for the fulfillment of an idea lead me into the software engineering field, where I see the plans conceptualized on a white board, become mission critical applications that people and companies depend on. As a bi-vocational Lead Pastor, I bring this same fascination to ministry. In ministry however, these plans and dreams take on a whole different meaning and weight. These dreams and plans are for the people that walk through the doors of Park Slope Christian Tabernacle, where I serve. There are two things that give me the greatest joy as a Pastor: A life transformed through a genuine encounter with Jesus and as a result of that encounter, a believer living out God's amazing plans for their life.

I grew up in one of the biggest project developments in the country, Queensbridge Houses in Queens, New York. During my adolescence my family began attending a

Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God (SED) church in the area called John 3:16. The church exposed me to a world distinct from what I was accustomed to in my neighborhood through a boys program called “Royal Rangers.” We traveled outside of the city and saw a world beyond its confines. We went to Camp “Mahanaim”¹ in Swan Lake, New York and traveled to the far off land of Pigeon Forge, Tennessee. The church was critical for me as it let me see a world beyond the physical, a world beyond the projects, and a world beyond “the hood.” The church and the Gospel it proclaims have always represented a world of possibilities for me. This is my part of my vision for the church, that it would be an agent of liberation and that liberty would release the God given potential of everyone it comes in contact with.

This project is close to my heart as it touches a group that I have identified with, emerging Latin@ young adults. I remember my struggles with finding my way in the world. It was a struggle that included understanding my Christian identity and its convergence with my identity as a Latino in the United States. I was convinced that I was God’s workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for me to do, but I did not understand exactly how this truth worked itself out in the real world.

My project considers the societal factors that contribute to the lack of direction experienced by emerging Latin@s in the United States. It discusses the spiritual reality present in their individual lives as well as what is present in the Latin@ community. The Scriptures will be our lens into these spiritual realities. I will also present theology and biblical passages that are useful in helping Latin@ young adults gain a vision for their

¹ “Mahanaim” means “camp of God” in Hebrew. It is the Assemblies of God Spanish Eastern District Camp in Liberty, New York.

lives. After discussing the problem sociologically and theologically, I will discuss what I have done to raise awareness in my local congregation, the SED, and to the greater Latin@ church community. I will present a framework that can be used to educate churches in developing an ethos of what I call “Life Vision.” Latin@ churches are in the best position to help guide emerging young adults in their journey to Life Vision. It is my conviction that the concept of Life Vision will give them the tools to be a consistent light to these precious ones and spark a new way that churches will be intentional in building up young adults toward living the dream that God has for them.

I share the blessing of many who told me during the project that God had placed people in their lives that believed in them. Specifically, they believed that God had a purpose for their lives that did not stop at a salvific event. At times, I received prophesies during a church service and other times, I received simple affirmations of acceptance and trust from those who pastored me. I am grateful for those who called out the minister that I am today. They include my pastors Rev. Leopoldo and Celica de Jesus, Rev. Natanel del Toro, and Rev. Reinaldo Romero. They include my Sunday School teachers like Sister Lucy, Fitzerlia Perallon and Rev. Marina Rosario. They include lay people like the wise Brother Temiltocles Concepción. I hope to pay forward the encouragement to pursue God’s dream for my life that I received from them. It was my church community that helped me to see the vision for my life and it is the church community that is called to help today’s Latin@ young adults in their quest for “Life Vision.”

There are a number of presuppositions in my work. I continue to be a Pentecostal and part of the Assemblies of God (AG). The Assemblies of God is a Pentecostal denomination couched in the classical charismatic tradition. The origin of the Pentecostal

movement in America can be traced back to the turn of the century in the United States. Many consider the Azusa Street Revival in 1906 as its true beginning.² In addition to its primary emphasis on the *charismata* or gifts of the Spirit, Pentecostalism essentially continues in the American Evangelical revival tradition with its emphasis on experiential faith, pietistic living, and plain interpretation of Scripture. Beside my Pentecostal faith tradition, I also believe in a contextual interpretation and application of Scripture. My identity as a Latino American informs my theological interpretation and brings a perspective that is not only useful to Latin@s but to the greater world because of my *imago dei*.

With regard to the terminology used in my work, I will you use the terms “young adult”, “emerging adult” and “millennial” interchangeably. I will use the term “Latin@” to mean Latina or Latino and I will use “Latin@” and Hispanic interchangeably throughout the chapters. The project was done in the context of churched³ Latin@ young adults and so the interviews and those young adults that I refer to in the text, unless otherwise specified, belong to AG Latin@ Pentecostal Churches. Another assumption I make in my work is that social factors in the world affect the emerging young adults in the church. Although churched young adults bring a set of spiritual and moral tools to engage the world, social factors such as poverty, access to education and social oppression touch the lives of the churched as well as the un-churched.

² Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “Azusa Street Revival Timeline,” *Enrichment Magazine: A Journal of Pentecostal History*, Spring 2006, 65-108.

³ When I refer to “churched” individuals are those who regularly attend church. For Pentecostals and Evangelicals in general this could mean at least one to two times a week.

In regards to my research, I make use of the Internet resources readily available. These sites are highly reputable sites such as Pew Hispanic Center and the US Census Bureau. In some cases I will make reference to online newspapers and magazines like the New York Times and CNN. These articles, thankfully, no longer need to be obtained through microfiche but are accessible through the marvel of the World Wide Web.

CHAPTER 1

LA SITUACION – THE SITUATION

The Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God

The Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God (SED) is part of the Assemblies of God USA (AG). The Assemblies of God is the biggest Pentecostal Denomination in the United States. The denomination began at the turn of the century as result of the great Azusa street revival in California in 1906. In 1914, in Hot Springs Arkansas, a broad group of Pentecostal ministers met to establish an organization that would facilitate world missions and provide accountability and fellowship. This group would be called the Assemblies of God. The denomination presently has 58 districts that are usually based on state boundaries or set according to language. Districts oversee their respective churches, the credentialing of ministers, and provide ministry opportunities and avenues of fellowship for ministers and church congregants.⁴ The Spanish Eastern District of the Assemblies of God (SED) is among the 8 Spanish language districts in the United States.

SED oversees the Northeastern Region of the US. It serves the Spanish speaking and sometimes bi-lingual congregations, with individuals that range from newly emigrated Latin@s to 2nd generation Latin@ Americans. The later generations are predominantly English speaking. The congregants represent the diverse Latin@ communities of the Northeast. These include Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Cubans,

⁴ “Assemblies of God - Our Form of Goverment,” Assemblies of God USA, <http://ag.org/top/About/structure.cfm> (accessed April 12, 2011).

Mexicans, Guatemalans, Salvadorians, Columbians, Ecuadorians and other Latin@ groups.

The beginning of the Spanish Eastern District is connected to the Latin@ migration to the New York City. The citizenship of Puerto Ricans in 1917 resulted in an influx of Puerto Ricans to places like East Harlem, NYC. At the end of World War II a new wave of Puerto Ricans settled in East Harlem giving the area the name “El Barrio.” In the 1960’s, socio-economic factors and changes to immigration laws ushered in a significant migration of Puerto Ricans and other Latin@s to New York City, from countries like Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Columbia. The Latin@ migration increased the number of Pentecostal churches in New York City. A coalition of New York Latin@ Pentecostal churches joined the Assemblies of God USA in 1958, beginning the SED.

New York is a key place of service for the SED. The 2000 Census revealed that its most densely populated city, New York City, had 27 percent of New Yorkers identifying themselves as Hispanic. The largest numbers of Latin@s are in the Bronx (644,705), followed by Queens (556,605), Brooklyn (487,878), Manhattan (417,816) and Staten Island (53,550). In general, New York State reported having 2,867,583 Hispanic or Latin@.⁵

I have long standing appreciation for SED Youth and Young Adult Ministries (SED Uth). It is a department that serves youth and young adults from the ages of 13 to 35 in SED. I was actively involved in various Youth and Young Adult Ministries. For example, at the age of 15 I was a Sunday School teacher and the Vice-president of the

⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. Census Bureau, 2000 Census (Washington D.C.: United States Census Bureau, 2000), 94-171, <http://ww.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/pub/soc001> (accessed April 12, 2011).

Youth Society of my church in Astoria, Queens. Years later I served as a Youth Pastor of a church in “El Barrio” (East Harlem). I also had the privilege of serving various years on a denominational district level as Leader of an organization for young men called Royal Rangers. Presently, I am the Lead Pastor of a church in Park Slope, Brooklyn but youth and young adult ministry still holds a special place in my heart. The challenge that we faced growing up and aligning our faith, generational and cultural identities, was the impetus for the creation of the Latino Leadership Circle (LLC),⁶ of which I am a part of, in the 2001. Part of LLC’s mission is the empowerment of Latin@ Young Adults.

Currently, there are over 5,200 young adults in SED.⁷ I will focus on the New York State young adult population of the SED. New York provides a good sampling of Young Adults throughout the district as most Latin@ segments are represented in the state as well as various socio-economic groups.

The SED Uth has had a long history of dynamic and vibrant youth and young adult ministry with its seasonal youth camps called “fests” and sectional tri-monthly youth rallies. SED Leadership is usually the seedbed of Pastors and denominational leadership. Among the most noted Pastors that have served as District Youth Directors are Dr. Rev. Nicanor Gonzalez, Asst. Director of the SED and Pastor of The Living God Church in Bronx, New York, Rev. Dr. Marcos Rivera, Chairman of the Northeastern Clergy Group and Senior Pastor of Primitive Christian Church in NYC, Dr. Pablo Diaz, Vice President of Ministries for Guideposts, and Rev. Samuel Rodriguez, President of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference.

⁶ "Latino Leadership Circle: Christ, Culture, Convergence." Latino Leadership Circle, <http://latinoleadershipcircle.org> (accessed January 26, 2013).

⁷ From a conversation with SED Uth Ministries Director Rev. Eddie Zaldana, Dec. 2011.

Local congregations are the heart of SED and it follows that the majority of young adult ministry is done in the local church. Ministry to young adults is transacted through services and programs for the general church and in many cases through programs and services specifically focused on this segment. Some church ministries focus on serving specific genders such as Royal Rangers boys program and National Girls program, others focus on doing ministry with older young adults up to 35 years of age. This ranges from small groups that meet in church and homes, weekly, monthly or bi-monthly for prayer, exuberant worship services, Bible Study, Sunday school and *Sociedades de Jovenes* or youth/young adult societies or departments. Churches have varying levels of youth/young adult ministry, from none to a full compliment of programs focused on general to specific segments.

Aimlessness and the Promise of Life Vision

Through the years I have observed Latin@ young adults with various levels of commitment to the church, some visit our meetings from time to time and others faithfully attend services on a weekly basis and are actively involved in our congregations. From the occasional church attendee to the highly active churched young adult, there are abundant examples of individuals whose experience of church does not result into the abundance of life espoused in Christianity. As Christians we understand that the life that we receive in Christ grants us our present state of salvation and that his salvation will eventually extend into eternity (John 11:25). Life for a follower of Christ however, is not limited to being born or “born again” (John 3:5). The biblical witness is that God is interested in blessing all the aspects of your life. Consider the words of Jesus:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

This verse is found in the portion of scripture where Jesus describes himself as the “gate” that provides salvation (John 10:9) but also as the “Good Shepard” who blesses with abundant provision, as the sheep “come in and go out, they find pasture.” The “full life” harkens to Psalm 23, which says:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul (Psalms 23:11).

There is a holistic provision for God’s followers. We will lack nothing in this earthly existence that God will not provide for. There are healthy “pastures” but God also directs us and rejuvenates our soul. It is the Lord’s will to care for us body, mind, soul and spirit.

In the first chapter of John begins the portrait of Jesus decisively different from the other gospels. While the other gospels begin with narrating the beginning of the earthly life of Jesus, the apostle John gives us glimpse of eternity past. He speaks of Jesus existing in eternity as God and as the author of all creation. Verse 4 further confirms he is God by declaring that life was in him. It says, “In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind” (John 1:4).

In other words, all life comes from Jesus. John is not only speaking of biological but of spiritual life. The Greek word for life here is *zōē*. Strong’s describes this *zōē* in the following way:

life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed, in the portion even in this world of those who put their trust in Christ, but after the

resurrection to be consummated by new accessions (among them a more perfect body), and to last for ever.⁸

This definition does an excellent job in capturing what Christ offers his followers, a life that is full in the present world and in the next. It culminates in a resurrected and eternal body. The creator is not only interested in our fellowship with Him at the end. There is portion of life for us on earth. What Christ offers is not a figment of imagination or some type of ‘pipe dream.’ His gift is real and not a ‘knock off’ or a ‘pirated copy’, but it is as authentic as anything can be because it comes from the author of the universe. This life is not passive but a dynamic movement toward God. It comes with blessings in this world for those who put their trust in Christ.

This is life in its fullness both in the present and for eternity. It is real and its vigor and devotion imply a sense of direction emanating from the God. This contrasts with the state of many of our young adults who show the same signs of emptiness of purpose and aimlessness of non-churched young adults. They are visionless, lacking the ability to see themselves as individuals who can have careers or perhaps make a significant contribution to others in ministry. The question we usually ask children, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” eludes them. They conform themselves with staying at home being supported by their parents or finding any low paying job. When I speak informally to Pastors and laypersons alike there is an overwhelming consensus that this is a pervasive problem. The general understanding is that, “Francisca es baga. mira a Maria,” Francisca is lazy look at Maria. Maria is a great example. In other words, my young person is just being lazy. Statistically, the Maria's are the exception to the rule.

⁸ Goodrick, Edward W., and John R. Kohlberger III. *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004).

The demonstration project will explore what abundant life might look like for Latin@ youth who are the Francisca's and Francisco's and how we can lead them to discover direction and purpose.

There is an overarching nihilism among some Latin@ young adults. Nihilism as Cornell West defines it is “The lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness and (most important) lovelessness.”⁹ West describes this state of meaninglessness among African Americans but it is certainly applicable to people of color in the United States, including Latin@s. As in the African American experience this nihilism is fed by background, cultural history and societal notions of self. Latin@ youth and young adults readily accept the negative messages of popular culture. There is a vacuum of messages and education with holistic biblical worldview that includes the appreciation of ethnic identity and the reality of the corporate sin and institutional racism. Latin@ young adults all too often run away from academic challenges, drop out of high school and lack a vision for their life and community.

If the church is the hope of the world as many preachers have proclaimed, it must be the hope for young Latin@s. In turn, the future of the Latin@ church rests in the hands of its young adults. If we consider the 2010 Census, which tells us that Latin@s account for more than half of the nation’s growth,¹⁰ the future of the church is tied to Latino youth. There are manifold connections tied to the level of vitality held by this population in our congregations. These connections are social, economic and spiritual.

⁹ Cornel West, *Race Matters* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 15.

¹⁰ Jeffrey S. Passel, D’Vera Cohn, and Mark Hugo Lopez, *Census 2010 Hispanics Account for More Than Half of the Nation’s Growth in Past Decade: 50 Million Latinos* (Washington D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, 2011), 1-2, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/140.pdf> (accessed February 4, 2013).

In some cases because so many Latin@s live so close to the poverty line in this country, having a young Latin@ with vision and purpose will determine the future of families in the Latino community. It is estimated that one to four Latin@s live in poverty according 2010 Census.¹¹ Purposeful young adults are critical for the mission of church and advancement of kingdom especially in Latin@ communities where hopelessness and overwhelming need can abound. As previously mentioned, the growth of Latin@s implies that they will be a growing mission field in the United States. Who best to reach Latin@s than Latin@s?

There is an obvious relationship between an informed and educated church and a church that is forward thinking. Young adults are indispensable to the vision of the Latin@ Church. Visionless young adults in our congregations will quickly result in a lack of vision in the church. Tackling this issue requires first an acknowledgement that aimlessness exists among our youth. So often we have attributed purpose and drive within youth with virtues that an individual possesses. We believe some have “it” and some don’t. The problem with this assumption is that there is a disproportionate amount of our young adults who do not have “it” and there are reasons for this. To offer a vision for life to these young adults we must believe that “it” can be obtained and “it” can be received. Secondly, this issue requires that the church recognize the reality of institutional and societal racism and its effects on Latinas and Latinos. We receive messages about who we are and what value societal places on us. The young and impressionable must be prepared to confront these messages and negative experiences.

¹¹ “Mark Hugo Lopez, *Hispanic Poverty Rate Highest in New Supplemental Census Measure* (Washington D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center, November 8, 2011), 2-3, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2011/11/148.pdf> (accessed June 7, 2011).

The church must place racism squarely under the rubric of sin and teach and proclaim it as such. Third, related to these messages is the reception of good messages, messages of who we are as Latin@s in Christ. This requires the communication of our spiritual reality and the reality of being beautifully and wonderfully made (Ps. 139:14) Latina and Latino. As the Puerto Rican Poet Pedro Pietri put it,

Here lies Juan
Here lies Miguel
Here lies Milagros
Here lies Olga
Here lies Manuel
who died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow
Always broke
Always owing
Never knowing
that they are beautiful people
Never knowing
the geography of their complexion
PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE
PUERTORRIQUENOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE¹²

This issue of aimlessness among Latin@ young adults, requires a multidisciplinary approach. I will use sociological imagination¹³ to present the interaction of Latin@ Young Adults with society at large and their Latin@ experience in the United States. As Christians we understand that reality is made up of more than just the physical world. This situation also requires a view into the spiritual world. I will also present what I believe to be the situation from a spiritual perspective. After presenting the issue as I see it in the following chapters, I will discuss what I have done to raise awareness in my

¹² Pedro Pietri. *Puerto Rican Obituary*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

¹³ Christian Smith, Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson and Patricia Snell Herzog, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 4.

local congregation, my denomination, and the greater Latin@ church community. I will present a framework that can be used to help churches have a culture of “Life Vision.”

A vision is a glimpse, a picture or an idea for something that is hidden or something that can be. As the name suggests, Life Vision is a vision for the life that should be and can be yours. As a follower of Christ, the meaning takes on a rich and transformative possibility. It is a vision for who God has called us to be. It encompasses the life that the Lord has asked us to live in all our areas and the vocation and mission we were created to do. The vision begins with a life centered on the giver of all life God and emanates out into all the facets of our lives. The giver of all life calls us into fellowship through the Son (1 Cor. 1:9). Life Vision is a God given passion and direction for our life.

When you have Life Vision there is a deep determination within you not to let life “just happen.” There might be ebbs and flows in regard to our clarity or direction but there is a consistent pull or push by the Holy Spirit toward living a fulfilling life that contributes to others and builds the kingdom of God. I believe that everyone has a Life Vision. It is a struggle to walk toward, but it results in life fulfillment. At some point in our lives it might become clouded because of our falleness or circumstances out of our control. At times culture or society could rob us from our God given destiny, but it can be reclaimed as we return back to the life source. In the following chapter I will highlight what social realities are present for emerging Latin@s that can affect their understanding of God’s dream for them, or Life Vision, in this country.

CHAPTER 2

LAS CAUSAS –SOCIAL CAUSES

What follows is an observation of the Latin@ and the young adult reality in the United States. I have considered these profiles individually and then synthesized them in order to get a better understanding of the mindset and perspective of the Latin@ young adult. In order to investigate the chief causes of aimlessness among Latin@ young adults, I looked at ethnic and generational demographics. I investigated the history and experience of Latin@s as well as the current experience of young adults in the U.S. My interest was not in precisely connecting lack of Life Vision with particular experiences individuals have had through being Hispanic or currently being a young adult. Rather my focus was on the cultural factors Latin@ young adults face and how it may cloud their Life Vision. Lack of Life Vision can have many tributaries and like with bodies of water there is a confluence making originating streams untraceable. The tributaries highlighted in the following pages are those that I find to be substantial contributors to the aimlessness experienced by many young Hispanics.

Poverty a Life Vision Inhibitor

The American experience is unique for every people group in the United States. Latin@s face challenges in this country that are particularly crippling for their development and progress. Poverty is among this community's most formidable foes. The Great Recession (2007-2009) increased the poverty level in the United States. In 2007 the

rate was 12.5%. By 2010 the rate rose to 15.1%. For Hispanics the rate was 21.5% in 2007 and 26.6% in 2010.¹⁴ Historically Hispanics have outpaced the national level and continue to do so.¹⁵ Currently, there are more Latin@ children in poverty than any other ethnic group.¹⁶ Research demonstrates that childhood poverty has a negative effect on aspiration and future achievement. There are psychological effects on children such as economic stressors that cause a wide range of unhealthy family dynamics and behaviors including a child reacting to a parent's mood swings and lack of support for the child.¹⁷ If we assume that an individual's childhood plays a critical role in their development, then we must consider that poverty is one of the factors that can contribute to a lack of aspiration in emerging adults.

Feelings of worthlessness and insignificance experienced by children of low-income households can carry into adulthood thwarting the development of a healthy self-image. As I will discuss, self-image is a key ingredient at arriving at one's purpose and developing a Life Vision. How can a child affected by poverty rise to become someone if they have viewed themselves as not really being worth anything throughout their lives? The mindset of Latin@s from low-income families with regard to future aspirations is that dreams are for people of means. Dreams are for "blancos" or whites. For many

¹⁴ Mark Hugo Lopez and Gabriel Velasco, *Childhood Poverty Among Hispanics Sets Record, Leads Nation* (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, Pew Hispanic Center, September 28, 2011), 7, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2011/10/147.pdf>.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, *Historical Poverty Tables - People, Current Population Survey*, <http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/data/historical/people.html> (accessed September 2010), Table 3.

¹⁶ Mark Hugo Lopez and Gabriel Velasco, *Childhood Poverty Among Hispanics Sets Record, Leads Nation*, (Washington D.C.: Pew Research Center, Pew Hispanic Center, September 28, 2011), 6, <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/2011/10/147.pdf>.

¹⁷ Aletha C. Huston, ed., *Children in Poverty: Child Development and Public Policy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 112, 292.

Latin@s there is an association between wealth and being white. There are places that you can visit as a Latin@ and those that you do not belong in or at least where you do not feel comfortable. My wife Alicia, who is Puerto Rican, grew up in East Harlem, New York, also known as “El Barrio.” She and her family attended a “raja tabla”¹⁸ Pentecostal church throughout her youth. She remembers her mother consistently using the phrase “este sitio es para blancos”, meaning this place is for white people, when referring to areas of the city that were financially well off or even places that would be considered middle class. When Alicia became an adult and started working, she introduced her parents to the concept of “dining out.” She helped them to understand that dining out was a small luxury they could afford at reasonably priced restaurants. She remembers their excitement the first time they dined out. Although it was a nice change, her mother still felt anxiety and kept her face down as to not meet what she thought were the staring eyes of non-latino customers. Irrespective of being able to afford to eat at an inexpensive restaurant, what the Vazquez family had in common with low-income families was the belief that some places were not for them because of their socio-economic status. Lack of access and a sense of inability, both as realities and as perception, are major obstacles in the Hispanic community.

Ana is a bright 24 year old from my congregation who emigrated with her family from Ecuador when she was 5 months old. She first felt the stranglehold on her dreams right before she graduated from High School. It was then that Ana realized that her family's low income status, a direct effect from having an undocumented status, financially prevented her from attending top tier colleges. After graduating high school

¹⁸ A Spanish term that literally means, “to split wood.” The idiom means to be strict and inflexible. The term is commonly used to refer to a legalistic church.

Ana stated, “ I graduated with honors and seeing all my friends who most were "gringos" being able to go to their first choice schools without worrying about finances, I was stuck in my second choice college not being able to afford to go another semester. I felt that I would end up not being able to pursue my education and not being able to ever have a career and that bought me down because this was what I was striving for.” In my interview with Ana she told me that she was able to overcome many of the obstacles faced by children struggling in poverty because of her faith and family, but this obstacle seemed overwhelming and was one of the most difficult for her to traverse. It began to eat away at her hope and confidence. Ana also told of how other Latin@s around her had tried to misguidedly encourage her. She says, “ There were a lot of people around me who did not understand why I was so down about not being able to go to school. Many of my Latino friends who did not go to school thought that I was being overly dramatic because school is not that important they said. Many would tell me that it's just how it is and that they aren't in school and are happy and that I should just accept it and stop being sad and angry for what to them was no reason.” Like many Latin@ families in low income situations, Ana's friends and family had bought into the notion that college was not for them irrespective of being documented or not.¹⁹

Rev. Virginia Maldonado, Director of Education for the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God, who also worked for Hostos Community College in New York City for 32 years, says that most Hispanics are unaware of financial and academic programs that exist to help low income families send their children to college. She adds that often there is a mindset that college is not for their children. Their hopes are that after high

¹⁹ Interview with Ana at Park Slope Christian Tabernacle, Brooklyn, NY.

school they might find a decent paying job and work hard to contribute to their family. There are differences between Hispanic immigrants and higher immigrant generation families in regard to their hopes for attending college. Many times immigrant families face issues of survival requiring that all working aged members seek employment. The possibility for higher education is less likely for young adults in these families, but she continues to say that even among second generation Latin@ families where parents can support college aged children, ignorance is still prevalent with respect to the opportunities of higher education for their children.²⁰

Poverty is a Life Vision inhibitor as it subtracts possibilities from individuals and families. It robs communities of hope and access to what sociologists call cultural capital, nonfinancial social assets such as education. As I considered poverty's relationship to Life Vision I was interested not only in the obvious tangible roadblocks that poverty presents us with, but its intangible effects also. Like the story of my mother in-law, I have consistently throughout my life heard many anecdotes of people from low-income communities feeling out of place, much of which I can personally relate to. I have observed that some of us carry a type of "poverty consciousness." By poverty consciousness I mean those perceptions, attitudes or behaviors that point to a direct or indirect exposure to poverty. This means that a person may or may not be in poverty but will act as if they are. For instance, even if the person has the means to eat out occasionally, they still believe eating out is too expensive for them. A person might check their wallet or purse several times to make sure they have enough money to buy an item of clothing or they might feel unusually nervous every time they pay a bill. More

²⁰ Rafael Reyes and Virginia Maldonado, interview by author, September 11, 2012, Old Tappan, New Jersey, tape recording.

injurious is when individuals internalize society's negative feelings for the poor, namely, that they are not wanted, are strange to "regular people" and that they are a burden. Similar to my mother- in law's experience in the restaurant, poverty consciousness in Latin@s is illustrated in the 1995 inspirational movie "Dangerous Minds." LouAnne Johnson, a recently divorced, ex-marine takes a teaching position in a high school in Belmont, California, a predominantly Hispanic and African American community. She shows a special interest in a student named Raúl Sanchero. Raúl lives in a barrio and has never been out to a restaurant. To encourage and help instill in him a sense of self-respect, she takes him to a French restaurant. While in the restaurant, Raúl is noticeably uncomfortable and he asks the teacher, "Hey, are you sure they have chicken?" The waiter comes and reads a bevy of French pronouncing entrees. The teacher asks the waiter for a few minutes in order to peruse the menu. Raúl asks the teacher again "Are you sure they have chicken?" LouAnne assures him that they do and encourages him to interact with the waiter when he comes back. Raúl says, "I cannot talk to that guy. He probably thinks I'm weird or something."²¹ Feeling weird or out of place is the sentiment of many Latin@s in poverty. Raúl is probably not only describing feeling weird because he is poor but because he is also Latino. In our society people groups such as African Americans and Latin@s are viewed as poor. It is not simply financial poverty that is related to this consciousness but ethnicity. The dynamic of consistent Hispanic immigration keeps Latin@ at the lower end of the financial spectrum. They tend to be seen as the poorer groups in the United States and so the stigma of poverty can still

²¹ LouAnne Johnson and Ronald Bass, *Dangerous Minds*, DVD, directed by John N. Smith (Burlingame, CA: Hollywood Pictures, 1995).

remain even after someone has climbed the social ladder, a type of “guilt by association.” Those with poverty consciousness buy into a classism where they see themselves at the lower levels of the societal echelon.

As with family customs, this consciousness can be passed on to children. Looking at poverty as a group dynamic led me to look into what sociologist and anthropologist call the “culture of poverty.” In 1959 anthropologist Oscar Lewis in his book *Five Families: Mexican Case Studies in Culture and Poverty* coined the phrase “culture of poverty” to explain the phenomenon whereby people are socialized into behaviors and perceptions that make it difficult for them to see beyond a world of poverty and eventually break free from its clutches. This meant that even if the conditions that lead to poverty were to cease, those who experienced poverty would continue behaving as if it were still a reality and in turn pass on these perceptions to their children. The idea of a “culture of poverty” was introduced into the American context by the Johnson Administration through the Monynihan report in 1965. In the report, urban Black families were said to be in this “culture of poverty.” The report described these families as being caught in a generational cycle of unwed mothers and dependency on the welfare system. This idea went under heavy fire by opponents who believed that by buying into this notion, the blame of perpetual poverty was on the poor themselves. Some sociologist’s and anthropologist’s believed that the report was essentially blaming the victim. In 1976, sociologist William Ryan refuted this idea and argued against the notion that the poor can stop being poor by changing their culture.²² More recently, in 2008, Professor Paul

²² David Harding, Michele Lamont, and Mario Luis Small, eds., *Reconsidering Culture and Poverty (the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Series)* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2010), 7.

Gorski warns against what he calls “the myth of the culture of poverty” found among many well-meaning teachers in the U.S. In an article by the same name, he describes Janet, a teacher in the Midwestern school system, who deals with children of low income households. Gorski comments,

"I love these kids," she declares, as if trying to convince me. "I adore them. But my hope is fading." "Why's that?" I ask, stuffing my notes into a folder." They're smart. I know they are smart, but . . ."And then the deficit floodgates open: "They do not care about school. They're unmotivated. And their parents—I'm lucky if two or three of them show up for conferences. No wonder the kids are unprepared to learn."²³

Gorski rightly points out the deficit mentality that is commonly used when dealing with children of poverty. Janet seems as if she has hit a wall and if there is not a shift in her thinking she will soon see her job as pointless. The deficit model that Gorski alludes to is in keeping with his view on the “culture of poverty.” The understanding that Gorski and those who oppose the concept of a “culture of poverty” is that it presents a type of negative uniform understanding for all people who are in poverty. This understanding ends up being a combination of stereotypes about the poor, which include an absence of strong morals, failure to exert responsibility, laziness, an inability to save for the future, lack of intelligence and addictions to alcohol and/or drugs.²⁴ Although this type of plight is found among some poor, these myths have largely been disproven²⁵. This definition for the “culture of poverty” aides racist notions and reinforces a type of secular

²³ Paul Gorski, “The Myth of the Culture of Poverty,” *Educational Leadership*, April 2008, pageNr., <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr08/vol65/num07/The-Myth-of-the-Culture-of-Poverty.aspx> (accessed December 24, 2012).

²⁴ Donna Walker Tileston and Sandra K. Darling, *Closing the Poverty and Culture Gap: Strategies to Reach Every Student*, ed. Donna E. Walker Tileston (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, 2009), xiii.

²⁵ Paul Gorski, “The Myth of the Culture of Poverty,” *Educational Leadership*, April 2008, pageNr., <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/apr08/vol65/num07/The-Myth-of-the-Culture-of-Poverty.aspx> (accessed December 24, 2012).

cast system.

More recently however, culture has become an area of interest for those who study poverty. There is no longer a monolithic understanding of those who are poor based on what amounts to a set of sophisticated stereotypes. New “culture of poverty” scholars like Mario Luis Small and David J. Harding avoid defining culture as tightly as Lewis did. They tend to accept the more general definition of Robert J. Sampson who defines culture as “shared understandings”.²⁶ These “understandings” are not fixed but reflect the current context of a group. They develop as reactions to sustained systems of inequality and marginalization. Furthermore, these scholars posit that people are not trapped in poverty because of inherent moral deficits or lack of values. They generally agree that groups of poor have common perceptions and attitudes depending on their contexts that could inform their behavior. More specifically, these scholars study culture using the analytical components of values, frames, repertoire, narratives, symbolic boundaries, cultural capital and institutions.

Values are the preferred end and not how something is arrived at. There is substantial evidence that the poor share the same values as the middle class.²⁷ I find that one of the most interesting components are “frames.” Essentially, frames are lenses that individuals and groups use to see themselves, their environment and the world. Frames tend to underscore certain areas in social life and obscure others.²⁸ These frames are

²⁶ Cohen, Patrick. “‘Culture of Poverty’ Makes a Comeback,” *New York Times*, October 17, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/18/us/18poverty.html?_r=0&pagewanted=all (accessed December 21, 2012).

²⁷ Mario Luis Small, David J. Harding, and Michèle Lamont, eds., *Reconsidering Culture and Poverty (the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Series)*, ed. David Harding, Michele Lamont, and Mario Luis Small (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2010), 14.

²⁸ Ibid., 8-19.

developed through past experiences and current understandings. People interpret events and react differently to them because of frames. An example of this is a project conducted by Small, where he analyzed the involvement of different people in a Latin@ housing project in Boston, Massachusetts. The project was a result of a community organizing several years before. He found that most individuals valued community participation, but that those who had a frame that included political activism in that community which made the Project possible, were more likely to take part rather than those who simply viewed the building as just another housing project. Additionally, he found that only those who reframed their understanding of their neighborhood and the project, later became active participants. Frames allow us to loosen the coupling of culture and actions. That is, if you are part of a culture you will act in a certain way. The relationship is better understood as what Small calls “constraint-and-possibility.” Instead of causing behavior, frames make it possible or likely. Another important point about frames is that an individual may have multiple frames operating and one frame may or may not influence another. For example, your job opportunity frame or your theology frame may influence what you believe about having children.²⁹ Most importantly for us, frames inform us of what is or is not possible now or later in our lives. They have the ability to show us great vistas for our future.

Repertoires are the least developed of the concepts. They are best understood as cultural tools that are used to deal with situations in life. They can be viewed as a person’s modus operandi based on their perception of options. An example of this is in the work of Jennifer Van Hook and Frank D. Bean, which demonstrated that when

²⁹ Ibid., 15.

Mexican immigrants were given pro-work repertoires instead of welfare-dependent ones there was considerable shift in their actions.³⁰

Narratives, as the name suggests, are stories that individuals tell about their lives. These stories are relaxed, contiguous events with a beginning, middle and end that reveal their experiences, barriers and opportunities. Narratives reveal how a person views themselves in relation to others. It answers the question where and who am I in the story.

Symbolic boundaries are perceived as group social categorizations. What they believe separates them from other groups or how they see themselves in the societal “pecking order.” Cultural capital, those social resources, other than financial, that people possess which allows them to advance socially. They include education, language and intellect.

Lastly, institutions, in general, are formal organizations with laws or codified norms. Out of all of these concepts, sociologists extensively make reference to institutions. We will revisit some of these components as they facilitate our understanding of mindsets that promote or hinder Life Vision.

Using the latest definition for culture of poverty, we can say that there is a culture of poverty that dissuades and works against the inception and development of dreams and aspirations among Latin@ young adults in the United States. Irrespective of being churched or un-churched, Hispanic young adults deal with the same issues of poverty.

Noel is an artistically talented 28 year old who volunteers as an Assistant Youth Director at church. He also works as a janitor at the church, which pays him just a little more than minimum wage. He has a wonderful “testimonio” or testimony. Noel’s mother

³⁰ Ibid., 16.

died when he was very young from a drug overdose. His father spent most of his life in and out of New York correctional institutions. Noel's "real" parent, he says, is his grandmother who raised him as best she could. He lived the greater part of his life on the streets of Sunset Park Brooklyn before he "met Jesus", and his life has never been the same he says. There was a marked transformation that occurred in his life that placed him on the path to clean living, spiritual growth and the development of great leadership skills. As wonderful as Noel's story is, he still feels stuck. He expresses the sentiment, "I know I'm a child of God, but I cannot find a decent paying job." Like Noel there are many Latin@ young adults who are told of their greatness in the church but experience a different social reality outside of it.³¹

The View of Latin@s in the United States

I have touched on the social realities of being Latin@ in the United States as I considered the issue of poverty among Hispanics. What follows is a more detailed understanding of the ways Latin@s are viewed in the United States and how these views affect them. A person's perception of themselves in society and how they choose to react to it will determine their course in life. In the case of Hispanics there will be a need to reframe who they believe themselves to be in the United States. Being one of the most recent and notable immigrant populations in the country, Hispanics face some of the same stereotypes and marginalization that other peoples groups experienced when they immigrated to this country. Among the myths are that they are people who take jobs from "real Americans", that they are uncouth and intellectually deficient because of their language proficiency. Consider what one of our founding fathers said about German

³¹ Noel shared his story with me in the late Spring of 2012 at Park Slope Christian Tabernacle, Brooklyn, New York.

immigrants to the United States:

Few of their children in the country learn English ... The signs in our streets have inscriptions in both languages ... Unless the stream of their importation could be turned they will soon so outnumber us that all the advantages we have will not be able to preserve our language, and even our government will become precarious.³²

These are the words of Benjamin Franklin and could easily represent the feelings expressed toward Latin@s in the United States today. Instead of being viewed as major contributors to the American experience, which they are and have been, Hispanics are seen as a threat to it. More than any other immigrant group, Hispanics seem to spark the least favorable responses.³³ If we add to the mix the issue of illegal immigration, for which Hispanics have been the poster children, societal perceptions about Latinos become even more negative creating situations like racial profiling in Arizona, where police were given the right to stop anyone who looked Hispanic to check their legal documentation. Even prior to the immigration debate, Latin@s in this country have been the main target of racial profiling. The issue of racial profiling hits a nerve in me because my brother was a victim of it a few years ago in New York City. I received a call from my sister in law at 3 am telling me that my brother had not come back home. Frantically, I searched the city trying to find him but to no avail. Finally, hours later I received a call from him when he got home telling me what had happened. He was coming back late from a church service and was pulled over by police officers who covered their badges. They illegally searched his car, handcuffed him and detained him in the vehicle for

³² Orn B. Bodvarsson and Hendrik F. Van den Berg, *Hispanic Immigration to the United States* (Lincoln: DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska -Lincoln, 2009), 339, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=econfacpub> (accessed December 27, 2012).

³³ Ibid., 317.

several hours. During that time they questioned if he had stolen equipment from a store and was part of an informal one-man lineup outside of the precinct. He told me of being insulted and threatened to be locked up. When he was finally let go he was warned to forget about what had happened “or else.” This was an unfortunate experience for my brother who was noticeably shaken by the unjust treatment and intimidating abuse of authoritative power. My brother was in his early twenties, a technical professional and the General Treasurer of his church, but that did not matter to the white police officers. To them he was just another dark skinned Latino who probably stole equipment from a store. This type of incident transpires time and time again in our country, anywhere where there are people of color.

In *Latinos: Remaking of America* by Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Páez it says:

The pervasive view, found among policy leaders as well as the general public, that Latin Americans in general are inferior and specifically are more likely to “commit crimes and take advantage of welfare, and less likely to work hard, do well in school, and have strong family values” powerfully shapes the Latino experience in ways that we are only recently beginning to understand. Most at risk are Latino youths who struggle to develop a healthy identity and sense of self in the context of such toxic attitudes and beliefs, an obstacle that further complicates the already arduous task of adapting to the institutions of American Society³⁴

When Latin@s youth accept or internalize toxic stereotypes provided by society it becomes a major social hindrance for their progress in life. Not only is their rich ethnic identity devalued, but the positive view that they are developing of themselves and who they are as Latin@s sustains a significant blow. Though wrong messages about Latin@s cannot be stopped completely, young adults can choose to listen to the right people in

³⁴ Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Páez, *Latinos: Remaking America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 23.

their lives and focus on the right messages.

Cristina, a junior in college, grew up in a predominately white community in Orangeburg, New York. She says, regarding the experience of being one of the only Latin@s in her school, that although she was never confronted with a racist comment the “strange looks that I got growing up communicated it all the same.” The constant stares and under the breath comments made her feel insecure and out of place. She did not have many trusted friends in grade school because of the racism she experienced. Even today she says, “Sometimes I still catch myself thinking that certain accomplishments are just out of my reach, not because of lack of ability but because of the culture I was born in.” Cristina says that she overcame the negativity and unfair treatment she received from classmates by allowing the encouraging words, affirmation and direction she received from her parents and church obscure those difficult experiences. She did not have many friends at school and so she used her extra time to study and stay at the top of her class. She was one of the brightest students in her class and fellow students (mostly whites) befriended her in order to get her help in various subjects. This wasn’t an ideal situation as she felt that she was sought after not because people wanted to be with her for who she was but rather for her academic prowess. Nevertheless, it gave her a much-needed boost to her self-esteem.³⁵

Archie was an average 16 year old Latino student at Hostos Lincoln Academy in the Bronx, New York City. Although his grades weren’t above average, his academic goals included attending college. As many students do, he made an appointment with the school’s guidance counselor to explore the different possibilities available to him. The

³⁵ Interview with Cristina in Fall 2012, Orangeburg, NY.

meeting with the guidance counselor was far from encouraging when the counselor took one look at Archie's grades, saw that Archie was a Latino and thus concluded that Archie wasn't 'college material.' He advised Archie that he would do best looking into a trade school.³⁶ Besides the fact that what the counselor said was wrong (there are opportunities for average students to go to college),³⁷ what is more disturbing is that I have heard this story told over and over again to our young people. Latin@s look to teachers, educators and those in authority for guidance and to explore possibilities. Sadly, however, many times they receive advice that is polluted by racial stereotypes.

Accepting negative messages of self will inform a person's transition into adulthood and will affect the construction of their social frames with regard to calling and career. The acceptance of prejudices and ethnic stereotypes act as Life Vision inhibitors disturbing the healthy development of a person's self-image and clouds the possibilities of their future.

Latin@s and Education

Among what distinguishes Hispanic immigration to this country is that Latin@s have not followed the same road of assimilation that other groups have followed. Even third generation Latin@s still find themselves with income and education levels way below the U.S. averages.³⁸ There is an obvious correlation between Hispanic income

³⁶ Rafael Reyes and Virginia Maldonado, interview by author, September 11, 2012, Old Tappan, New Jersey, tape recording.

³⁷ "College Options for Average Students -Ask the Dean," College Confidential, <http://www.collegeconfidential.com/dean/archives/000277.htm> (accessed January 2, 2013).

³⁸ Orn B. Bodvarsson and Hendrik F. Van den Berg, *Hispanic Immigration to the United States* (Lincoln: DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska -Lincoln, 2009), 339, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1044&context=econfacpub> (accessed December 27, 2012).

levels and Hispanic educational achievement. For any group, education is a tool for social mobility and progress. Hispanics are in desperate need of narrowing the education gap between them and non-Hispanics in America. If they are to mature into a healthy people group in this country and if they are to be rightfully represented in places of influence and power in the United States such as in the areas of government, corporate America and the church, education must not just not be seen as an ideal, but a proper goal amongst all the generations of Latin@s. Education is usually the social capital that offers the most unlocking of other financial and social resources in society. Barna's research on *Hispanic America: Faith, Values and Priorities* reports that among social views and concerns, Hispanics feel that education and employment are their top concerns.³⁹

This concern for education presents an opportunity for significant community and church based initiatives that concentrate on helping young Latin@s close the education gap. Barna's research demonstrates that the Hispanic community is aware of their current situation. As a Pastor, I'm interested in understanding how the church can be a catalyst for education in the Hispanic community. In response to the education gap within the Hispanic community, the Baptist General Convention of Texas has created a "Hispanic Education Initiative." The program mission states:

Education is a fundamental building block for having options in a chosen career path. The goal of the Hispanic Education Initiative is to keep students in school through graduation and then on to college, reclaiming students who left school and helping preschoolers be prepared for Kindergarten.⁴⁰

The objective of the initiative correctly recognizes that education is the essential

³⁹ Barna Group, *Hispanic America: Faith, Values and Priorities* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2012), 28.

⁴⁰ "Hispanic Education Initiative," Texas Baptists, <http://texasbaptists.org/education-discipleship/hispanic-education-initiative/> (accessed December 27, 2012).

element for providing career choices and a career path. I would add that education not only provides pathways for careers, but it also opens up worlds of ideas and information that is vital in the formation of aspirations and hopes in a young adult's life. Our present society demands a basic level of education in order to thrive or at least survive. The place that Latin@s occupy in this country requires that they no longer take a regular approach to education. A more aggressive approach is required in order to overcome the education gap. A lack of education is a serious Life Vision inhibitor. When students drop out of high school and/or college, it often results in unemployment, poverty, dependency on public assistance, poor health, or incarceration, which perpetuates a drop out mentality. Children of dropouts are more likely to drop out.⁴¹ The factors of economics, societal perceptions and education have interplayed in the Latin@ community. Education impacts income. Poverty impacts education. Negative societal perceptions are manifested through racial stereotypes and policies that impact education for Latin@s.⁴²

The Emergent Adult Experience in the United States

Latin@ young adults do not simply inhabit one world, but live in multiple realities. The more acculturated a young adult is, the more they must deal with realities of perhaps being bi-cultural and the complexities of "code-switching." Accepting that there are different levels of American cultural influence among individuals depending on what immigrant generation they fall in, their geographic location, education, and other life circumstances, it is correct and helpful to assume that Latin@ young adults are also

⁴¹ John H. Tyler and Magnus Lofstrom, "Finishing High School: Alternative Pathways and Dropout Recovery," *America's High School* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 77-96, http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/19_01_05.pdf (accessed December 29, 2012).

⁴² Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: the Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York, NY: Crown, 2005), 20.

American young adults. I would like to focus the rest of this chapter on the realities of being a young adult in the United States today, specifically what are some over-arching trends or themes that might inform us on the state of emerging young adults that can result in obfuscating Life Vision.

The economy certainly influences feelings and sentiments in the America's young adults. Pew Research Center's 2012 Report, "Young, Underemployed and Optimistic," found that in general young adults were finding their way in the world slowly in a difficult economy. Though most believed that they currently or will in the future have enough income in the future, the bulk of their findings revealed that young adults have been severely impacted by the recession. The percentage of young adults employed, 54%, between the ages of 18 and 24 is lowest since 1948. More than 82% believe that it's harder to find a job now than in the previous generation. The country's financial challenges are affecting not only their present lives but also their future plans. Among the 18-34 year olds, almost half of them have taken a job they did not want in order to meet their financial responsibilities. Tough economic times have also shifted the view of when a person should be financial independent from their parents. A 1993 Newsweek poll revealed that 80% of Americans felt that the age of independence should be 22. Now only 67% believe it should be at 22. Lastly, less than half (46%) of 18-34 year olds that are working believe that they have the education or training to move ahead in their career.⁴³

Besides the anxiety and trepidation that accompanies finding your way in the world, the economy is but one more mountain presented to the young adult. Finding

⁴³ Paul Taylor et al., *Young, Underemployed and Optimistic: Coming of Age, Slowly, in a Tough Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research, 2012), 4-12, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2012/02/young-underemployed-and-optimistic.pdf> (accessed January 3, 2013).

closed doors to employment after graduating college, having to stay at home for a longer period of time than desired or having to return home can diminish bright young hopes and aspirations. It is estimated that 40% of 20-Somethings return back home at least once.⁴⁴ A “failure to launch” syndrome can also be a result of changes in culture in our western world. Psychologist Jeffery Jensen Arnett says that young adults in developing countries rarely experience a period of “emerging adulthood.” What we currently have in American society is a by-product of the 21st century. He says:

Among the cultural changes...that have led to “emerging adulthood” are the need for more education to survive in an information-based economy; fewer entry-level jobs even after all that schooling; young people feeling less rush to marry because of the general acceptance of premarital sex, cohabitation and birth control; and young women feeling less rush to have babies given their wide range of career options and their access to assisted reproductive technology if they delay pregnancy beyond their most fertile years.⁴⁵

Arnett believes that changes in western society have influenced the passage to adulthood. The information age requires more preparation and competency. Now computer proficiency is required in almost all non-blue-collar sector jobs. This wasn’t the case during the better part of the 20th century. Now even with blue-collar jobs there is a rise in the use of technology. So much so, that some blue-collar jobs are providing high paying employment.⁴⁶ Societal norms have radically shifted. Regarding this, Psychologist Meg Jay speaks of a twenty something named Kate who is having trouble understanding

⁴⁴ David M. Newman, *Sociology: Exploring the Architecture of Everyday Life*, 9th [ed.] ed. (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2012), 7.

⁴⁵ Robin Marantz Henig, “What Is It About 20-Somethings?” *New York Times*, August 18, 2010. <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/22/magazine/22Adulthood-t.html?pagewanted=all&r=0> (accessed January 4, 2013).

⁴⁶ Ann Fisher, “Trading a White Collar for Blue,” *CNN Money*, June 19, 2009. http://money.cnn.com/2009/06/19/news/economy/learn_skilled_trade_blue-collar.fortune/index.htm (accessed January 4, 2013).

what she is to do with her life:

For hundreds of years, twenty somethings moved directly from being sons and daughters to being husbands and wives, but within just a few decades a new developmental period opened up. Waking up every day somewhere between their childhood homes and their own mortgages, twenty somethings like Kate were not sure what to make of the time. Almost by definition, the twenties became a betwixt-and-between time.⁴⁷

What in the last century provided an incentive to cross the adult rubric is no longer there. The acceptance of pre-marital sex and cohabitation has removed marriage as a rite of passage for 20-somethings. Newer ideas of having children in your thirties or early forties have become more popular in recent years. Some of the social impetuses that would have motivated young adults to commit to relationships and seriously consider their course of life earlier are no longer present. Young adults are in a holding pattern. Jay believes that there is a type of cultural malaise that young adults are in where they believe that they can essentially live without any real consequences. They can live an unfocused life because the “30s are the new “20s” they say. She vehemently opposes this idea by pointing out that 80% of life's most defining choices are made by age 35. Jay says this idea comes from popular culture, which sends a contradictory message regarding this critical time of life. While it trivializes the 20's, suggesting that this is the time to party and sow your wild oats and make no real commitments, the culture also glamourizes the 20's, making it seem that it is the pinnacle of your life, and that everything else by comparison is down hill.⁴⁸

Assuming that Pentecostalism is countercultural with respect to pre-marital sexual

⁴⁷ Meg Jay, *The Defining Decade: Why Your Twenties Matter--and How to Make the Most of Them Now* (New York, NY: Twelve, 2012), 16.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 9-13.

behavior and that Hispanics tend to have a more traditional view of family, does not negate the fact that Latin@ churched young adults do not live in protective boxes unperturbed by the economy, societal changes and norms. They hear the same aimless and confusing messages about who they should be as 20-somethings from the media. They struggle to a greater extent with issues of identity because of their bicultural and multiracial heritage.⁴⁹ They are not immune to what Christian Smith has entitled “The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood.” Christian Smith and his colleagues identify five significant problems facing young adults in the United States. These are: the need for a moral compass, escapism through substance abuse, consumerism, bad sexual choices, and political detachment. Smith also believes that the issues confronting the young in the United States are tied to the influence of American culture.⁵⁰ Albeit to a lesser extent, I have found cases of the problems described by Smith in the Pentecostal Church. However, to a greater extent, I have found churched young adults steer clear of these dangers. In my experience, to the extent that a person is closer to an active experiential faith through a commitment to Christ, the least likely they are to find themselves experiencing the first four issues described by Smith.

Political disengagement has long been the perceived traditional road of the Pentecostal Church⁵¹ and though the 2012 election gives us hope of positive change with regards to future voter turn out, Latin@s, make up 17% of the total U.S. population, but

⁴⁹ Ed Morales, *Living in Spanglish: the Search for Latino Identity in America* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Griffin, 2003), 17.

⁵⁰ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 12.

⁵¹ Amos Yong, *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 4.

only 10% of voters in the election. More than half of the Hispanic Protestant Charismatic Christians believe that the Bible and politics do not mix.⁵² For a group that prides itself as having the Bible as the rule of faith and conduct, this essentially implies that politics is not that important. This also implies that young adult Hispanic Pentecostals are receiving the message from multiple cultures that it is ok to be politically disconnected. There are two issues at stake. First, that Latin@s as a whole cannot afford to allow the social empowerment provided by political engagement to go to waste especially when considering the challenges the community faces. In order for corrective policies to be enacted with respect to poverty, education, and discrimination, which are some of the seedbeds of young aimlessness, the Hispanic community must be engaged in the political process at all levels. Secondly, because there is a blurred line between social and individual empowerment,⁵³ in many ways, when an individual exercises her or his right to vote they are essentially affirming their existence in the political system of the United States and declaring that they are someone and that their vote makes a difference. For the young adult, voting provides a connection to the external world that they must interact with to pursue their life's work. Voting provides a level of significance, at least the possibility that they can be heard.

Conclusion

In summary, there are social factors that inform a Latin@ young adult. These factors have an affect on their outlook on life and the possibilities for the future. The

⁵² Barna Group, 100.

⁵³ Katherine van Wormer and Fred H. Besthorn, *Human Behavior and the Social Environment, Macro Level: Groups, Communities, and Organizations*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 266-67.

challenges faced by the Latin@s in the United States directly impact this group and the development of hopes and dreams, both externally and internally. Changes in western culture have created a prolonged period of emergence that is often confusing to young adults. American popular culture offers contradictory messages and superficial visions of the 20's by both demeaning it and placing it on a pedestal. Emerging adults have a difficult transition and often fall into unhealthy thinking and are prey to self-destructive behaviors. The stressors have never been so intense for the young, the pitfalls so numerous, but as the Spanish Pentecostal corito says "No hay nadie como mi Dios, no hay nadie", there is no one like my God, there is no one. If anyone can help young people, it's their Creator. If anyone can provide a blueprint and direction for their lives, it is the chief architect of salvation.

CHAPTER 3

LO ESPIRITUAL – SPIRITUAL REALITY

In this chapter I will discuss certain spiritual realities present in the Latin@ community in the United States. These realities directly impact the young adults, especially now because of this critical time of Latin@ ascendency in the country. I will discuss the dimension of the spirit/soul in conjunction with the social, as I believe these are linked. The Hispanic community has contributed significantly to the United States and they are poised to make an even greater impact in the coming years. Hispanics now represent 1 in 6 adult Americans.⁵⁴ Hispanics are also a significant part of the 44 percent of children younger than 18 and the 47 percent of children younger than the age of five that are in minority households.⁵⁵ To cripple this people group, especially its most promising young adult population, would negatively impact the social progress of the United States and ultimately the Kingdom of God.

“Sanchocho” for the American Soul

This community's cultures, history, racial make up and dynamism are unique in the fabric of America. Virlgilio Elizondo calls it a “mestisaje” or mixture. I like to see it as a Sanchocho, a Latin@ dishes of which I am quite fond. “Sanchocho” is a delicious

⁵⁴ Barna Group, 4.

⁵⁵ United States Cenus Bureau, “Census Bureau Estimates Nearly Half of Children under Age 5 Are Minorities,” United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb09-75.html> (accessed January 15, 2013).

stew found in several Hispanic countries made up of a variety of meats, vegetables and broth. In many ways it a “super” soup and I would testify that it alleviates many ailments including colds and the flu. Latin@s bring a wonderful “Sanchocho” to the American table. As a whole, the Latin@ experience contains glimpses of darkness, hope, liberation and joy. What distinguishes them from other groups is that they are participants both historically and in the present of all of these groups. Being in the United States for several generations has not removed them from their immigrant status and at the same time, some have fully acculturated into American Society. This makes Latin@s acquainted with the plight of poverty but at the same time, able to make the Forbes list of “The Richest People in the World.⁵⁶ They understand the bitterness of marginalization. They understand what it is to live in a multiracial reality. Hispanics represent a bridging of cultures. They understand how to go between and reconcile distinct worlds both in history and in their present day context in the U.S. When Hispanic Americans begin to take their rightful places of power in proportion to their population, they have the potential to carry with them a social repertoire useful for the service of all people in this country.

Behind the Physical Scenes

By all estimations, Latin@s are on the rise in this country. This potential for social elevation makes them a coveted target for, what Ephesians calls, principalities and the powers (Ephesians 6:10). Plainly stated, I believe that Satan has a plan to pillage and disrupt the progress of people of color in the United States. Senator John McCain noted

⁵⁶ Rosario Mariela, “Carlos Slim Helu Still the World's Richest Man, 2 Latinos Make Forbes' Youngest Billionaires List,” *Latina*, April 2011, <http://www.latina.com/lifestyle/money/carlos-slim-helu-still-worlds-richest-man-2-latinos-make-forbes-youngest-billionaire> (accessed January 14, 2013).

in his 2008 concession speech that despite the political side you might fall on, the election of Barak Obama marked a significant milestone in the social history of the United States. He went on to say:

But we both recognize that, though we have come a long way from the old injustices that once stained our nation's reputation and denied some Americans the full blessings of American citizenship, the memory of them still had the power to wound.⁵⁷

We have certainly progressed as a country by electing our first African American President, but we are still far off from allowing the full blessings of American citizenship to all Americans. Also, there are those Latin@s who being Americans at heart are denied citizenship to a country to which they fully contribute. The “old injustices” that McCain refers to, in particular slavery, was not only a social struggle but also, as the abolitionists proclaimed, a moral and spiritual one. The remnants of slavery, discrimination and segregation where also battled in these spheres. The civil rights movement of the 60’s did not simply have clashes between non-violent protestors and police in Selma and Montgomery, Alabama, but in the spiritual dimension there was a battle that raged between the forces of good and the forces of evil, which revel in the fostering of stereotypes, oppression and racism among humankind. Our country has new injustices such as broken immigration systems that reinforce a permanent underclass in America, but still benefits from it. It rips families apart by conducting raids on the undocumented, deporting parents and leaving their children in the country.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ John McCain, “John McCain’s Concession Speech,” *Politico*, 2010, <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1108/15303.html> (accessed January 16, 2013).

⁵⁸ Thompson, Ginger. “After Losing Freedom, Some Immigrants Face Loss of Custody of Their Children,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/23/us/23children.html> (accessed December 21, 2012).

The spiritual forces of evil not only have strongholds on individuals, but they also maintain strongholds of poverty, lack of access to education, self-limiting and self-destructive social frames on groups of people. The Charismatic / Pentecostal understanding of a stronghold is an area in which we are held captive or in bondage by the enemy due to our mindset.⁵⁹ This definition must extend itself when speaking of groups, for not only are there shared group mindsets that maintain negative cycles of behavior, but we understand that a fallen spiritual world also impacts those that make decisions that adversely affect people groups and communities. Places of earthly power and authority can also be places of strongholds. The Gospel of Mathew tells us:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me” (Matt. 4:8-9).

The last temptation presented to Jesus was power over all the kingdoms of the world, implying that Satan had overwhelming influence over the earthly realm. The influence of darkness over government is aptly displayed in the story of the Exodus. Although Satan is not specifically mentioned, the implication is that the persecution of God’s people is his doing. Furthermore, in Exodus, Pharaoh is a type of Satan and in the narrative, Satan’s instrument.⁶⁰ Exodus tells us that when the Israelites population became too numerous, the Pharaoh decides to enslave them:

So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built Pithom and Rameses as store cities for Pharaoh. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and spread; so the Egyptians came to dread the Israelites and worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh

⁵⁹ Joyce Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in Your Mind*, Updated FaithWords ed. (New York: FaithWords, 2011), 15.

⁶⁰ Peter Enns, *Exodus* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2000), 87.

labor in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labor the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly (Exod. 1:11-14).

Egyptians turn to ruthless oppression and enslavement because of the fear and distrust they had over the growing number of Israelites. They planned to control the people by taking away their dignity and relegating them essentially to beasts of burden. They build whole cities on the backs of the Israelites. Later in the chapter, the Pharaoh targets the young, the future Israelite generation, as he attempts to kill all of their male children. Enslavement, and by extension the oppression of people, has long been a plight for humanity. It is a sin and the seat of demonic activity. The Adversary's modus operandi is in fact enslavement through sin (Rom. 6:16) and he is part of its replication in the social and physical realms. The dehumanization of a people strikes at the "imago dei" or image of God that all human beings partake in. Maintaining systems that oppress and stifle the progress of people falls squarely in the camp of darkness.

As with the Israelites, the Hispanic population continues to grow in the United States. They also have built this country from the western and southern states that bear Spanish names, to the northeast that accounts for 14% of the Hispanic population.⁶¹ In the U.S. they are the migrant workers on the field. Many are exploited because of their undocumented status, doing the jobs that other Americans will not do. They are paid way below minimum wage, expected to work longer hours and exposed to unsafe working

⁶¹ Sharon E. Ennis, Merarys - Ríos-Vargas, and Nora G. Albert, *The Hispanic Population: 2010* (Washington D.C.: United States Census Bureau, May 2011), 4, http://www.hacu.net/images/hacu/OPAI/2012_Virtual_Binder/2010%20census%20brief%20-%20hispanic%20population.pdf (accessed January 16, 2013).

conditions.⁶² As in the Exodus story, there is an assault on the Latin@ young, bearing the highest rates of childhood poverty and the lowest educational attainment levels in the country. We stand on the shoulders of our African American sisters and brothers who fought for the dignity of all people of color, but there is still a liberation that must occur.

The progress of Latin@s in the United States comes is in direct conflict with the agenda of darkness. This is because earthly oppression mimics spiritual oppression. Secondly, the Enemy is invested in perpetuating sin. The sin of oppression is particularly sinister as it robs the image given to human beings by their Creator. Thirdly, those who are oppressed are vulnerable to the false messages they receive about themselves and their people, specifically in the area of self worth and dignity, another target rich environment for Satan. Because of the process of human cognitive development, the ethnic young are particularly susceptible to internalizing negative beliefs about their people.⁶³ Emerging Latin@s navigate the difficult waters of identity, culture, and making their way in the world. It is an impressionable time. Biologists tell us that the area of the forward thinking part of the brain, the frontal lobe, is still not fully developed. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, many decisions made during this season in their lives will permanently impact their lives. When a young adult internalizes the poison of ethnic oppression, it cripples them and introduces them to a social frame that in their eyes, demeans them before society and thus limits their possibilities in the world. Ethnic oppression is a Life Vision inhibitor. The possibility of Life Vision is destroyed or

⁶² Southern Poverty Law Center, *Teaching Tolerance: The Project of Southern Policy Law Center*, 10 Myths About Immigration, Spring 2011, <http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/number-39-spring-2011/feature/10-myths-about-immigration> (accessed January 16, 2013).

⁶³ Kathryn Geldard and David Geldard, *Counselling Adolescents: the Proactive Approach for Young People*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2010), 11.

greatly deteriorates based on the lie that young adults accept about themselves and about their people. Satan, the father of all lies (John 8:44), scores a decisive victory over Latin@ people when the young internalize ethnic oppression. I will discuss the impact of messages later in the chapter.

Lastly, the agenda of darkness opposes Latin@ progress because of what the Latin@ experience can offer the wider groups of people in the United States. Latin@s can offer all people the promise of participating in a “Sanchocho.” An example of this can be found in the church. In “A Future for the Latino Church”, Daniel Rodriguez observes various models of multilingual and multigenerational Hispanic congregations in the United States. He points out that Latin@ lead congregations are reaching out beyond their own demographics and impacting the greater community. His study reveals that English dominant Latin@s are tampering with the “most segregated time in America”, Sunday mornings, by offering models of church that understands the challenges of creating racially and ethnically diverse spaces of worship. They are uniquely equipped to welcome the country’s multicultural future.⁶⁴ No doubt that the strong sense of family, a genuine understanding of “koinonia” lived out in Hispanic culture and an infectious spirit of celebration that permeates Latin@ culture is a draw for anyone.

What I have described in the preceding paragraphs have elements of what Charismatic believers call “spiritual warfare.” The belief highlights the fact that Satan is at war with humanity and seeks to enslave it and that Christians are called to oppose his works. The Latin@ community is in spiritual warfare with the Enemy. Their probable

⁶⁴ Daniel A. Rodriguez, *A Future for the Latino Church: Models for Multilingual, Multigenerational Hispanic Congregations* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 106.

ascendancy from the margins in this country to places of power, spurred on by their numerical growth and their promise of an American “Sancocho”, make their young adults strategic marks for Satan. His schemes involve “principalities and powers” both on the spiritual and earthly planes, that create or perpetuate social oppression and the propagation of lies about people of color. These lies once accepted become belief systems that are detrimental to the aspirations and dreams of emerging Latin@ adults.

A Personal Battle

Spiritual warfare is fought two ways, corporately and individually. There is a battle that rages in the mind and heart of every Latin@ young adult. The stakes are high because the outcomes could hamper the abundant vision for life, and consequently, the good plans that God has for them. The main offensive weapon used in the battle, are false messages or lies. As innocuous as they might appear, if allowed, they have the potential of diminishing self worth and dashing hopes and dreams. Solomon said, “Above all else, guard your heart for it is the well spring of life” (Prov. 4:23). The camp of the Evil One is known to be a direct and an indirect communicator of lies, from the account in Genesis (Gen. 3:1-5), to his brazen temptation of Christ (Mt. 4:1-11). The telling of lies is his most potent armament. These messages come from various sources but have their origin in Satan. The Apostle Paul gives us the connection:

You once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh (Eph. 2:2-3).

He points out that Satan directs the course of the fallen world. This is in reference to his powerful influence over society. Then he speaks of the life we were liberated from that was under satanic control, a life directed by the flesh or fallen nature. Traditionally

seen as the enemies of Christians, the world, the flesh and the Devil are the transmitters of false messages. When the Apostle speaks of the world and the flesh he is speaking of those things in the world and the sinful nature that is in opposition to God. Throughout our lives we are consistently being bombarded with false messages. When we are young adults, we are more vulnerable because the pleasure-seeking part of our brains is in full swing, while our frontal lobe is still developing. Perhaps this is why Paul warns Timothy to “flee the evil desires of youth” (2 Tim. 2:22). Among the many traps that the enemy sets for young adults, through the acceptance of messages in popular culture, is the belief that they are in a season of frivolity and unrestrained exploration. As such, major life impacting decisions do not have to be made yet, while in fact the quality of their future lives very much depends on the decisions they will make at that time. Latin@s as well as other people of color in our country must deal with the affirmation of their inferiority through cultural stereotypes, bigotry, and institutionalized racism. This provides fodder for the Enemy to construct well-argued assaults on young Latin@s. When these arguments take root in the heart, they become mental strongholds or negative belief systems as in the case of internalized ethnic oppression.

Dr. Elizabeth Rios in her book aptly titled “Don’t buy the Lie: Eradicating False Belief Systems That keep us from our Destiny” says the following regarding belief systems and the Enemy:

Most of our belief systems work for us in a positive way and help us navigate through life. However, when a belief is formed early and with strong emotions, it can remain unchanged in the subconscious until such time as it’s consciously changed. ... Satan knows our weaknesses that are linked to our BS [belief systems] and he attacks our minds in those areas. He attacks us with his lies.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Elizabeth D. Rios, *Don’t Buy the Lie*. Rios (Ghetto Rose Publications, 2012), Kindle Locations 566-570.

Rios rightly points out that weaknesses are linked to belief systems and that belief systems are exploited by Satan to attack us. In the previous chapter I intimated some false beliefs systems that young Latin@s might appropriate such as, “because I’m Latin@ I do not belong in this place”, “because I’m Latin@ I have to prove that I’m not dumb”, “only white people have a real future in this country”, “because I’m Latino my opinion is not as valuable as another.” The list is extensive. The common theme is inferiority based on Latin@ identity. I pointed out the spiritual warfare that Latin@ young adults are engaged in, particularly some of the offensive strategies that Satan employs to deter them from their God given future. In the following chapters I will further highlight theologies, biblical narratives and passages of scripture that can be used to combat aimlessness and lack of vision in Latin@ young adults. The idea is not only to use these passages to teach Scripture, which is always a worthy endeavor, but to be contextual and help our youth connect the dots to God’s unique dream for them. The use of Scripture is an essential component of the framework that I propose in my project, enabling churches to lead emergent Latin@s to Life Vision. The framework contains an approach to Scripture that sheds light on our distinct value and purpose in God. It gleans understanding from the stories of people with a purpose in the Bible. The approach both highlights passages that inspire and teach us how to guard our precious birth rite.

CHAPTER 4

ESCRITURAS – THE SCRIPTURES

Gods of Vision for Humanity

The Bible is rich with the economy of God. Economy comes from the compound Greek word “oikonomia”- “oikos” means house and “nomos” means law.⁶⁶ It is literally the order or plan of the house. The term implies that creation is God’s house. It reveals that God is not simply a creator who leaves the world to its own devices, but that the creator is very present and interested in the world. Genesis chapter 1 tells us that humankind was created in God’s image (Gen. 1:27). God is not simply interested in the world. He loves creation (John 3:16). The Lord’s care for the world is revealed in his purpose and God’s purpose is part of the Lord’s revelation to us. Any vision for our lives must be grounded in our understanding of the Divine’s purpose. In the First Testament, God introduces divine purpose through relationship. The Tetragrammaton (YHWH) commonly pronounced “Yahweh” is the name that often appears for God in the Hebrew Scriptures. Translated as “Lord” in English translations, it appears in the context of God’s interaction or relationship with humankind. Yahweh is the personal God who walks with his people. Beginning with Genesis chapter 2, Yahweh creates the world, creatures and humankind. The narrative highlights the creation of humanity by saying, “Yahweh God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils

⁶⁶ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: with Topical Index* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 174.

the breath of life, and the man became a living being" (Gen. 2:4-7). The creation story points out that humankind is not simply a random creation of God. We were not simply created by divine proclamation. We are significant enough that the narrative distinguishes humanity from the other creation by stating that Yahweh formed us. The fact that it tells us that Yahweh breathed in us the breath of life, speaks of God's impartation to us. We are special and unique from all other forms of creation. We are the "crown of creation." The Divine endues us with life. When man became a living being, it is not that he only came into existence. The word here is "nephesh", and Strong's tells us that it refers to a soul with a mind, passion, emotions and desire. A mind, passion, emotions and desire all point to a purpose. In the pursuit of leading Latin@ young adults to Life Vision, the value of humanity as Yahweh's special creation should be addressed. This truth is foundational as it counters the nihilism that they might feel. It also provides a platform to build upon when considering the backdrop of the beauty and variety of God's "good" (Gen. 1:31) creation and subsequently the value that God places on each individual. Additionally, grasping the truths that a purposeful God creates us in God's image and that God's breathe of life is in us and bestows us with a will and drive can help in facilitating Life Vision awakening.

After creation humankind is in covenant with Yahweh, beginning in Eden and leading up to the present. A major characteristic of covenant is the responsibilities of both parties. Humanity's responsibility when in covenant with Yahweh was obedience and was connected to purpose or mission. After creation, man was given the privilege of naming the animals (Gen. 2:20). Later he gives Adam and Eve the following mandate:

... 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing

that moves upon the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so (Gen. 1:28-30).

Humanity's mission was to reproduce and steward the earth and its creatures. This mandate is repeated again to Noah and his sons after the flood (Gen. 9:7). Paradise is usually thought of a place of idleness, but the place that every paradise is a faint echo of, the Garden of Eden, was a place of purpose. Humankind was made to be a collaborator with its creator. This ties back to why God chose to bestow humanity, the crown of creation, with the *imago dei* and God's breath of life. This idea continues and takes on new meaning in the New Testament when Paul tells the Corinthians, "For we are God's fellow workers" (1 Cor. 3:9) in reference to preaching the Gospel of Christ. The idea is set on a broader scope when writing to the Ephesian church when he tells them, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Eph. 2:10). We are created to be in fellowship and partnership with God to do good works that God has already prepared for us. Our creation implies that there is a plan for our lives. Discovering and seeing a glimpse of the good works that God has set up for us is the essence of a Life Vision.

God's Vision for Israel

After the fall, divine purpose is lost for the whole of humanity. In response to our rebellion toward God, Isaiah tells us that "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). However, God's plan for humanity is not deterred and Yahweh chooses a people. Israel is introduced into God's economy through God's calling. Before providing Israel

with the Law, the book of Exodus tells us that Yahweh gave them a mission before the world:

“You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites” (Exod. 3:8).

God reminds them of their deliverance from Egypt and that if they were obedient to the Law they would be his treasure among the people of the earth. Israel’s part in God’s purpose for them is that they would be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Israel was to be God’s example to the world, and “share his glory among the nations”, as the prophet Isaiah later proclaims (Isa. 66:18-22). God calls them and provides a collective vision for their lives that includes a home in the land of Canaan, “the land of milk and honey” (Exod. 34:2). The book of Exodus tells the story of their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. God performed great miracles during this time including the parting of the Red Sea (Exod. 14:21) and providing Israel with bread from the sky (Exod. 16:31) but it was a time of testing for Israel as well. Even after seeing God’s deliverance and God’s provision on the journey, a trip that could have taken several days took them 40 years to complete because of unbelief. At a critical moment of assessing the land of Canaan, the spies were sent out to do reconnaissance and they returned with mixed reports to the people. They reported:

And they told Moses, “We went to the land where you sent us. It is indeed flowing with milk and honey, and this is its fruit. But the inhabitants are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large...” “ We are not able to go up against these people, because they are stronger than we are” (Num. 13:27-31).

The spies confirmed that what God had promised them was indeed there, a land that “flowed with milk and honey”, but along with the abundant bounty of the land there were fierce inhabitants. They added to their report that they could not defeat the people of the land. Further in the chapter the spies dissuade the people by telling them that the land devours its inhabitants. This then caused a rebellion against Moses and his leadership (Num. 13:32-14:19).

The generation that first set out with Moses from Egypt, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, would not enter the Promised Land (Num. 14:33-34). The writer of Hebrews reminds us of this cautionary story, so we might not turn away from God because of an “unbelieving heart” (Heb. 3:7-16). There are some lessons to be learned from Israel in respect to Life Vision. After God clearly reveals God’s dream and destiny for them, Israel wandered in the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula because they failed to trust God and believe in God’s promises for them. It is only after they believe through a new generation, headed by Joshua, Moses successor, that they are able to finally take hold of the fulfillment of the vision that God gave them as a nation. We can wander aimlessly through life, even after receiving direction for our lives from God, if we fail to believe in God’s vision. God tests us as part of our journey to the destination he has planned for us. However, some of us unfortunately never arrive at the Promised Land. There is another aspect of Israel’s journey into Canaan that can offer us teaching. God gave the land to them as a promise, but it needed to be won by them. There was a part they needed to play. Humanity was again co-laboring with God, for in the battle the Lord was a warrior (Exod. 15:3). Although God has presented a vision for our lives it will not be without a fight, but in the fight God is with us and God is a mighty warrior.

Abraham and Sarah's Calling

Before the calling of the nation of Israel, there was the calling of the patriarch Abraham, the father of the nation, who is first known as Abram, means “high father.”⁶⁷ He is called out of Mesopotamia (Acts 7:2-4) to accomplish a pivotal work in human history. God gives him an incredible vision for his life. He tells Abram:

“The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen. 12:2-3).

God asks Abram to leave his home. God promises Abram that he will be the ancestor of a great nation. The Lord promises that his name will be renown. God’s favor will be bestowed on Abram and his descendants to the extent that those that bless Abram and his descendants will also be blessed in turn. Conversely, a divine protection is placed on Abram and his people and those that curse them will be cursed. Then there is the most significant blessing received from Abram’s nation, the messianic promise. This blessing will extend itself through time and transform nations and individuals through Christ Jesus. Another glimpse of the vision for Abram’s life is provided for us in chapter 15 of Genesis, years later from Abram’s initial calling, God comes to Abram in a vision:

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision:
“Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.”
But Abram said, “O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?” And Abram said, “You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir.” Then the word of the Lord came to him: “This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir.” He took him outside and said, “Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be” (Gen. 15:1-4).

⁶⁷ Edward L. Dickson, *Genesis* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 132.

God appears to Abram and reconfirms his dream for him. He assures Abram and settles his fears. God's protection will be over him and their relationship will be Abram's greatest recompense. Abram has not experienced what God has promised him yet. Abram's legacy has not begun, so when God once again confirms God's plan for him he asks "how" since he was without a child. The Lord asks him to look to the stars and try to count them as that will be the number of Abrams descendants. In the later chapters we see that God begins fulfilling his promises to Abram, whose name is changed because of belief in the promise, to Abraham, meaning father of multitudes.⁶⁸ Though Abraham reinterprets God's promises to him by sleeping with his wife Sarai's maidservant, the promise still comes through Sarai, who is also renamed Sarah, which means princess.⁶⁹

The story of Abraham teaches us a few things in regards to the nature of a calling. Firstly, God can call us out of our home, our neighborhood, our state or even our country, the place that we were raised, in order for us to follow our Life Vision. More importantly God calls us to see beyond where we live. This is an especially important point considering the fact that when emerging Latin@s cannot see beyond their "hood" or "barrio", it will limit their potential. God calls us beyond the confines of barrios and ghettos to see a greater world of possibilities. Seeing beyond where we "live" can spark a Life Vision awakening, as it expands our field of vision.

Another point is that God is asking Abraham to leave his "comfort zone", a place that was familiar to him all of his life and to venture out into an unknown land, only with the promises that God offered him. For many it is comfortable to stay to within the

⁶⁸ Edward L. Dickson, *Genesis* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 132.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 137.

boundaries of a known culture and people. As I discussed previously, beyond the natural inclination of being with people we know, for many Latin@s there is a sense that they do not belong outside of the confines of their ethnic geographic concentration. Like Abraham, God asks Latin@ to step out of the comfort zones connected to erroneous understandings of where a Latin@ can and should go. These understandings are the bi-products of internalized ethnic and racial oppression.

As with Abraham's descendants, the journey is a vital factor in the calling. The journey is both a time of preparation and a time of testing. The journey requires faith especially when living in a foreign land. The writer of Hebrews tells us:

By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:8-10).

It requires faith to live in a land where you are considered an immigrant, but where God's Life Vision for you will come to fruition. This is the state of Latin@s, even for those who belong to families who have been American citizens for several generations.⁷⁰ Holding on to the promises in a foreign land is vital to completing the journey. Believing that this land is also ours, despite what is said to us through popular culture, institutions and even the thoughts that we have of ourselves, will allow us to experience the future that God has architected.

⁷⁰ Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 41.

Moses Finds Out Who He Is

Along with Abraham, Moses is one of the greatest figures of the Hebrew Bible. Moses is called to liberate his people from Egyptian captivity. His calling offers us a picture of how to understand our self worth and identity. After being called through a burning bush while he was tending flock in the far side of the desert of Horeb, Moses responds to God: “Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” (Exod. 3:11). This self-deprecating response is not uncommon in scripture. Gideon in Judges (Judg. 6:15) and the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 6:5) have similar responses. Moses lacks the self-worth and confidence to respond to the call of God. Subsequently, Aaron and Miriam, his siblings, join Moses and they enable him to live out his calling. Dr. Pablo Diaz points out that there is a paradigm in play here. The self-esteem of an individual can be built up in the presence of community. An individual’s sphere of community can be used in God’s plan. Family, friends and mentors are instrumental in helping young Latin@s gain self-esteem.⁷¹ Self-Esteem is a Life Vision contributor as it legitimizes their possession of a God-given plan for their lives. In the heart of the young adult Latin@s it is essential that they feel worthy of a good future before even conceiving a vision for their lives.

Another aspect of Moses’ response to the Lord is that he contends the multiple dimensions of his identity. Orlando Crespo, director of LaFe Ministry for InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, aptly points out that when Moses responds to God he is asking in essence: “how do you want me to present myself to Pharaoh?” Moses was multi-cultural.

⁷¹ Pablo Diaz, “Positive Thinking Through Hispanic Eyes: Building Self-Confidence And Self-Esteem Among Latinos” (DMIN diss., Drew University, 2006), 36-37.

He was a Midianite shepherd, but was also a Jew, and in his formative years, an Egyptian prince. God never gives him an answer. Moses is all of these and at that moment, God wanted to use all that Moses was to accomplish God's purpose.⁷² Crespo says "God uses us where we are, in all our complexity and confusion, especially in our ethnic identity, and does great and wonderful things through us."⁷³

When considering Life Vision, Young Latin@ American should embrace all that they are: American, Latin@ and Millennial. Moses' response to God represents the angst of many emerging Latin@s, "Who am I" to confront people of high position, authority, and power? "Who am I" to engage the world? Our goal is to teach them that they are God's ambassadors, with all of the complexity of who we are.

God's Dream for Joseph

No discussion of a vision for life is complete without speaking about Joseph. God gave Joseph two dreams regarding his life. In the first, all of his siblings would honor him. This was demonstrated by them bowing down to him in the dream. The second dream showed all of his family bowing down to him. Once again, this dream was symbolic of the honor that would be bestowed on him (Gen. 37:1-11). Joseph's Life Vision was offensive and abrasive to his brothers. Since the events that were to transpire had not occurred yet, his dreams were misunderstood and were lightning rods to an already dysfunctional family situation. Furthermore, it was not clear how or in what context Joseph dreams were to be fulfilled - was Joseph destined to be the leader of tribes? How is it possible for the great Patriarch Jacob, later named Israel, to bow down

⁷² Orlando Crespo, *Being Latino in Christ: Finding Wholeness in Your Ethnic Identity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2003), Kindle Location 191 of 1438.

⁷³ Ibid.

to a son? I'm sure that Joseph did not fully understand how these things would take place. There are times when even our families do not understand our dreams. Sometimes, like Joseph, our plans and ideas are ahead of the times.

Audacious dreams call for wisdom. Who, when and how we share our dreams can determine how they will be received. On the other hand if we are to be preachers as well as nurturers of dreams we must give dreams a wide birth in the lives of emerging Latin@s. We must be careful not to mock or belittle any dreams Latin@ youth have. Dreams mature and life brings unforeseeable contexts to dreams as in the case of Joseph.

Joseph's life is an incredible example of steadfast hope and faith in the Lord. He is captured and sold into slavery by his brothers because of their jealousy toward him (Gen. 23:28). He serves diligently in the house of a government official named Potiphar, and is placed as the chief administrator. However, when Joseph refuses the daily advances of Potiphar's wife, she lies by accusing him of attempted rape and Joseph is thrown in an Egyptian jail. Even in prison Joseph continues to be faithful to God and as a result is given responsibilities and finds favor (Gen. 39-40). Joseph continues to dream and through a set of circumstances and interpretations he makes, is taken out prison and ascends as an advisor to the Pharaoh himself (Gen. 41). The fulfillment of Joseph's dream is a picture of reunion and reconciliation. Joseph's brothers are forced to come to Egypt because of famine and after a test from Joseph, Joseph reveals himself and is able to provide for all of his family. Joseph forgives his brothers, understanding that God used even the evil that was done to him by them for the good of all Israel (Gen. 45:4-5). Later, Joseph says, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20).

The story of Joseph teaches us to continue to hope, persevere and dream. Hope, perseverance and dreaming are Life Vision contributors. Joseph faced trials of all kinds before finally fulfilling his dreams. He had many opportunities to stop believing, but in every post and job he was given, he was diligent and gained good rapport. Throughout his slavery and incarceration he continued to trust in God. He did not stop believing and he did not stop dreaming. In effect, it was the dream that finally liberated him and ushered him into his destiny. Before we reach our destination, God is setting the road of preparation before us. Events and circumstances will be set in play and if we continue to believe the dream the Lord set before us it will lead into the fulfillment of our life's vision. The fulfillment of our Life Vision sometimes seems delayed. We are sometimes misunderstood, rejected, and the victim of injustice, but it doesn't mean we need to have a victim mentality. By this I do not mean that we somehow ignore that we have been wronged or that an injustice was done to us because realizing that is part of our healing. However, we cannot allow those wrongs to destroy our God given future and our pursuit of our life's mission. This is especially true for people of color in the United States. Like Joseph, Latin@s had been given a robe of many colors to wear, our beautiful mixture of races and cultures. The marginalization that we have experienced by our brothers and sisters can dissuade us from our life's calling, but perhaps what was "meant to harm," God can "use for good." For this to occur we must forgive and remember the brother and sisterhood of all humankind. As I mentioned previously, Latin@s can be a "bridge people" for America and their probable ascension may bring about the "saving of many lives."

The Second Testament Vision

As in the First Testament, the Second Testament provides us with a calling of a people. This call is not based on a certain group of people, but it is a calling that transcends geographical borders, race and ethnicity. It is the universal church of Jesus Christ. The followers of Jesus make up the body of the church and as followers of Christ our Life Vision is inextricably linked to this body and its purpose. The church is a mystical-missionary organism. In many ways, it is what it does, more precisely what it is called to do. It is an organism because it is an active living entity, composed of living, breathing human beings joined by the Holy Spirit.

The etymology of the word church gives us a good starting point for understanding its nature. The Greek term for church is “ekklesia.” It is a compound word from the preposition “ek”, meaning out, and the verb “kaleo”, meaning to call.” The term is found in the fifth century BC and in the writings of Herodotus, Xenophon, Plato and Eriphides. It originally referred to a group of citizens called out and assembled for a specific purpose.⁷⁴ The Septuagint uses ekklesia as an equivalent to the word “qahal”, meaning a congregation, convocation or assembly.⁷⁵

It was in this context, the context of mission that the church had its conception. The Gospel according to Mathew tells us that after Jesus asked the disciples whom the people were saying he was, Peter proclaims the true identity of Jesus, “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God’” (Mat. 16:16). Messiah or

⁷⁴ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: with Topical Index* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 42.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 9.

“Christos” in Greek means one who is “anointed.”⁷⁶ Priests and kings were anointed with oil in the Hebrew Bible, as a sign of being set apart for service. Moreover, it was symbolic of the Spirit’s anointing or empowering. The “anointed one” or Messiah is that one who would come with a mission to liberate and save Israel. Jesus points this out as he identifies himself in the Gospel of Luke, as the “Son of Man who came to seek and save what was lost” (Luke 19:10). After his identity is made plain to his disciples, Jesus takes this opportunity to reveal his new vision for Peter’s life and for his chosen, Christ says, “And I tell you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church [ekklesia]; and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18). Similar to Abraham and Jacob, Jesus changes Simon’s name to “Petros” or little rock,⁷⁷ in the context of the mission he was to fulfill.

The Scriptures place great significance on names. In many cases they tell a story of the Lord’s work or reveal God’s purpose for an individual. Names are important because they are linked to a person’s identity. Abram went from being a “high father” to the father of multitudes” or Abraham.⁷⁸ Jacob went from being a “deceiver or cheater” to “the prince of God” or Israel.⁷⁹ Simon goes from being “one who has heard”⁸⁰ to a “small rock” or Peter. Christ calls out Simon’s destiny to be one of the foundational stones of the church. From one “who has heard” of what God is doing to one who is called to be

⁷⁶ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words: with Topical Index* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 101.

⁷⁷ Grant R. Osborne, ed., *1 Peter, 2 Peter, Jude* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1996), 157.

⁷⁸ Edward L. Dickson, *Genesis* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2008), 132.

⁷⁹ Andrew Choi, *New Life: Springs of Water* (Bowie, MD: Author House, 2005), 40.

⁸⁰ Kevin Green, *Zondervan All-in-one Bible Reference Guide* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2008), 575.

part of the God's mission. To live a life of purpose we cannot simply be the ones who have heard of what God is doing but instead, we must respond to the calling of being built into what Peter calls in his first epistle a "spiritual house" as "living stones" (1 Pet. 2:5).

It is also in the context of mission that the church has its inception, in the Day of Pentecost. Luke tells us that Jesus, prior to his ascending, told his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Jesus calls his disciples to preach the Gospel throughout the world in the power of the Holy Spirit, so that those who receive the message might receive salvation (Acts 2:21).

Considering the above, we can say that the church are those have been called out of the world to be in fellowship with Jesus Christ, assembled and empowered through the Holy Spirit to be in the world with an intentional salvific purpose. The church transcends institution and denomination. It is composed from those of the "ends of the earth." It is not simply a mystical body of "believers", but by definition a political organism involved in the transformation and liberation of all people.

Considering the formulation of a Latino Protestant ecclesiology, Justo Gonzalez uses the four traditional "marks" or "signs" of the church as a way of explaining the true nature of the church. One of the marks he expounds on is, "The Church is Apostolic." Rather than using a traditional interpretation (i.e., the church's leadership is part of an unbroken line of succession with the apostles), Gonzalez introduces a more etymological understanding, of "apostolic." To be apostolic Gonzalez says, means to be "apostolos" or

sent. The Greek definition has a definite mission and purpose.⁸¹ Believers as a whole are sent on a mission to transform the world with the Gospel. It is evident that the church defines itself as people who do ministry. Unfortunately, a notion that many have of the church is that it is a special group of “sanctified” people, and that within this group there are a select few who do ministry. The rest are simply to live pious lives, on the “Gospel train” to heaven. However, the image of the church in scripture is one of “body ministry.” Body refers to the memorable Pauline analogy of the church being a body, with parts, which are distinct, but function in unison (1 Cor. 12:14). This is one of the major distinctions between the call of Israel and the calling of the Church. While Israel was called to be a “kingdom of priests”, only a select few were called to specifically minister through their gifts.⁸² In the church however, everyone is given gifts to minister and they are empowered by the Holy Spirit. Paul says in the first letter to the Corinthians:

God’s various gifts are handed out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various ministries are carried out everywhere; but they all originate in God’s Spirit. God’s various expressions of power are in action everywhere; but God himself is behind it all. Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people (1 Cor. 12:7 [MSG]).

Gifts to the church or “Charisms,” also include the ministry of those whom Christ has given to the Church for the purpose of helping it become a ministering entity. In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul tells us, “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:7-16). Some of us have been

⁸¹ Justo L. Gonzalez, “In Quest of a Protestant Hispanic Ecclesiology” in *Teología En Conjunto: a Collaborative Hispanic Protestant Theology*, ed. Jose David Rodriguez and Loida I. Martell-Otero (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 87-89.

⁸² Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Pub, 1984), 15.

called to dedicate our time fully to the body of Christ. With regard to the office of an Elder or Pastor, the Apostle Paul tells Timothy, “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task” (1 Tim. 3:1). Even with all of the failures of clergy over the years, the job of a Pastor has been named one of the most fulfilling, noble, and influential vocations in the country.⁸³ I believe this mostly has to do with having a clear Life Vision. Implicit in Life Vision is your calling and the question of calling is explored before even considering the ministry. Speaking personally, as a Pastor I feel that I have the greatest job in the world and though I am bi-vocational because of the economic realities of my church, my heart is of a full-time Pastor. Being in the lives of people, leading them to a relationship to Christ, nurturing their spiritual development and watching their growth has no greater honor in my book.

Body ministry is not only in affect within the body, but also outwardly to the rest of world in “kerygma” (preaching) and in “diakonia” (service).⁸⁴ The book of Acts tells us regarding early believers: “They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need (Acts 2:45). In fact, church is not simply a body, but it is a body whose head is Christ. The church is the representation of God on earth. Consequently, the church is then called to continue to show Christ’s love and compassion to the world as well as proclaim his good news. In the past, many Pentecostals believed that the mission of the church to the world was only in verbal proclamation and embraced this idea, but in the recent years

⁸³ Jeanna Bryner, “Survey Reveals Most Satisfying Jobs,” *Live Science*, Date: 17 April 2007, pageNr., <http://www.livescience.com/1431-survey-reveals-satisfying-jobs.html> (accessed January 25, 2013).

⁸⁴ Charles van Engen, *God's Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1991), 89.

the Assemblies of God, has added “Compassion” as one of its mission points. This represents a shift to a more holistic understanding of the mission of the church.

As Christians, we belong to a calling entity vibrantly empowered by God, through the Holy Spirit. All of us are given gifts to be used in service to the body of Christ. There is no one without a gift, so there is no one without purpose. These gifts are given to us by the Spirit and are part of God’s vision for our lives.

God has not called everyone into “full-time ministry”. By this I mean, someone dedicated solely to caring and equipping Christians for ministry. The majority of the church is called to different types of modality, equally as important to the kingdom of God. Our Life Vision is an understanding of our ministry in the body and our mission in the world. The great commission of Jesus at the end of the Gospel of Mark is that we should go “into all the world” and preach the Good News (Matt. 28:19). This can mean the offices of midtown Manhattan, to the art studios of downtown Soho, from the stands of a kid’s soccer game to the kitchen of a local restaurant. When we are living out our purpose, the proclamation of the Good News dons a beautiful package. The body of Christ has Millions that can engage the world in its multiple dimensions. Believers can be in the areas of commerce and business, the arts, education as well the equipping of the church and live out their calling.

Engaging The World Through Our Calling

There is a false premise amongst believers that leisure is good and work is bad, the only exception is ministry, because it is directly connected to the to the kingdom of God. This is not a biblical idea. As we considered earlier Humanity was given purpose

by God through work in the garden. The first man and woman were asked to take care of the garden:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it... He [God] brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name...So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals” (Gen. 2:15-20).

They were created for mission, and their work was meaningful because God made them co-creators or co-laborers. This fact makes work important and significant. Work is part of God’s “good” creation. Work becomes toil after the Fall with the introduction of sin (Gen. 3:17-19). A crucial part of the Christian mission in the world is to recover the meaning and joy of work.⁸⁵ This is where having a Life Vision, the way to proceed in our lives based on the way we were made by God, comes into play. When we are operating in our God given vocation through our job, we are fulfilling God’s mission and recovering the true notion of work. We get the English word “vocation” from the Latin word “vocatio” which literally means, “to call.” Some differentiate a calling and a vocation, ascribing calling to a spiritual assignment, and vocation to an occupation, but they are literally the same thing. We may lose our jobs, but because our vocation is God given, we do not lose our vocation. A vocation is an essential part of God’s redemptive work on earth. It is also a “charism” or gift.

Business

There are biblical paradigms of believers engaging their world with their vocation. The book of Acts speaks of a businesswoman name Lydia who was

⁸⁵ Gordon T. Smith, *Courage and Calling: Embracing Your God-Given Potential* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2011), Kindle Location 282 of 3213.

instrumental in assisting the Apostle Paul at starting a new church in the Roman province of Philippi. Acts says that she was from Thyatira, a city twenty miles southeast of Pergamum that was famous for purple dyes. She was a “dealer of Purple,” meaning that she was an entrepreneur. Purple was the color of royalty, and purple cloth a luxury item.⁸⁶ This would indicate that she was a woman of means. Many believe that her home housed the first church community at Philippi and that she was a major benefactor for the mission of Paul and Silas.⁸⁷ God gifted her with organizational gifts that she used both in the world and in the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:28 [MSG]). Some differentiate natural and spiritual gifts and obviously there are some gifts that are suited for the body, such as tongues and their interpretation. However, administrative and organizational gifts are not limited in their scope to just within the body of Christ. The fact that Paul states in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 that we all have a gift to be used in the body does not preclude its use in the world for mission. What makes Spiritual Gifts spiritual is that they are given to someone who belongs to the community of the Spirit. What makes them spiritual is not the place that they are used, but that they are used to bring God glory and accomplish the Lord’s purpose on earth. This is keeping with the possibilities that are implied in Ephesians chapter 2 that states, “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10). These “good works” are not limited to the four walls of the church.

⁸⁶ Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon* Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2009), 12.

⁸⁷ Charles C. Williamson, *Acts (interpretation Bible Studies)* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 68-69.

Similar to Lydia, the archetypal virtuous woman in Proverbs 31 is an entrepreneur. Among her many tasks, the proverb tells us:

She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard. She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks. She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night (Prov. 41:16-18).

The virtuous woman is involved in real estate, agriculture, and trading. The proverb communicates that business, the production of goods and services, is part of society and a necessary part of our lives. More importantly, the woman is a believer and it tells us that her work is done well. It is a reminder that when business is done with excellence it is worthy of accolade.⁸⁸ When a service or product is delivered with quality it points back to the talent of the merchant. This ultimately points back to the Creator who gave them the ability to think and imagine a process or an invention and it fulfills the purpose of God in the world.

The Arts

When Israel traveled toward the promise land God instructed Moses to build a tabernacle so that there might be fellowship between God and Israel. The Tabernacle was a portable place of worship where God would dwell with his people. God asked that the tabernacle be made according to the pattern he would give Moses (Exod. 28:8). The construction and adornment involved skilled craftsman and artist. The Lord tells Moses:

“See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah,³ and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—⁴ to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze,⁵ to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts.⁶ Moreover, I have appointed Oholiab son of Ahisamak, of the tribe of Dan, to help him. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you...” (Exod. 31:2-6).

⁸⁸ Smith, *Courage and Calling*, Kindle Location 1770 of 3213.

These verses reveal that through the Holy Spirit, God empowers people with artistic skills and crafts. Bezalel was filled with the Spirit with all types of knowledge and skill. Oholiab was also given abilities and skills by God for this important work. When we consider the work of the tabernacle we learn that function and form are both important to God. Artistic expression contains an aesthetic beauty that brings honor and worship to the creator of a beautiful world. Gordon Smith says:

This text in the book of Exodus is a reminder that Christian worship depends heavily on the work of the artist. Whether it is the writer who crafts the songs or those who accompany our worship, we cannot conceive of worship except as designed, led and accompanied by those gifted as musicians and singers. But we are also deeply indebted to the visual artists, those who design our spaces of worship and who then in turn design and foster beauty in our worship.⁸⁹

Many things can be said of the arts. The arts can elevate our spirits, stretch our imagination and bring nourishment to our souls. Those who have this vocation enrich our lives and get us in touch with deeper things.

Teaching

Among the most influential figures in my life are teachers and professors that I had the privilege of being taught by. The imprint that a good teacher makes in our life is indelible. Teaching is so vital that God placed it as one of the five fold ministries of the church: “He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:7-16). God uses teachers to transmit knowledge, wisdom and to build character, in and outside of the classroom. Through different mediums, such as books and the Internet, in all its manifestations, teachers can impact society and set the future course individuals and nations. The Torah tells us regarding the goal of teaching:

⁸⁹ Smith, *Courage and Calling*, Kindle Location 1869-1871 of 3213.

“Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak, and let the earth hear the words of my mouth. May my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, like gentle rain upon the tender grass, and like showers upon the herb. For I will proclaim the name of the Lord; ascribe greatness to our God!” (Deut. 32:1-3).

As the rain and the dew help nourish tender grass, that it might grow, so teaching must help to nourish our minds that we may flourish. Ultimately good teaching points to a great God, which created all things. Teaching is a gift that provides knowledge and wisdom. Teachers help us understand the created things and they help us understand God. Teaching is the primary way of providing discipleship. After the destruction of the temple the central worship in Jerusalem was disrupted and rabbinic Judaism became the primary expression of Hebrew faith. Rabbi's were teachers who taught and gave commentary on the Torah. Rabbis expounded on the scriptures in different places and would travel with their “Talmadim.” The Talmid's (student) deepest desire was to follow their rabbi so closely that they would start to think and act like him.⁹⁰ Jesus was a rabbi and his Talmadim were his disciples that he instructed for 3 ½ years. In the Christian faith a follower of Jesus is a Talmid for we seek to grow more and more into the image of Christ.

Conclusion

The theologies, biblical narratives and passages I have addressed deal with the themes of purpose vision and calling. They span the First and Second testaments. They are helpful for the teaching of Life Vision as they consider that God has always been a being of purpose and plan. God's economy includes the creation of humankind with an embedded purpose. It includes the calling of a people that carry out God's mission in the

⁹⁰ Zev Garber, *The Jewish Jesus: Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation (shofar Supplements in Jewish Studies)* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2011), 26.

world in the form Israel and Christ's church. It includes the calling of normal people who are flawed but empowered to carry out God's plan. The Lord's plan is in and outside of the church through each person's ministry and vocation in the world.

CHAPTER 5

LA IGLESIA – THE CHURCH

In this chapter I will discuss some of the strategies that the church can employ to lead Latin@ young adults to Life Vision. These components represent a framework that if utilized on a consistent basis by churches, can help Latin@s navigate the challenging season of life that is emerging adulthood. Furthermore, it is my belief that these strategies will bring transformation not only to the young adults in the local church, but as a much welcomed side effect, the rest of the congregation. As I pointed out in chapter three, “Lo Espiritual- Spiritual Causes”, aimlessness among young adults is not only social, but also a spiritual battle. All of these strategies should be, “empapado con oración” or bathed in prayer, as we Pentecostals say. The goal is that the church would become a Life Vision power plant, where young adult receive bursts of Spirit filled energy that sparks a journey towards a life vision. The strategies discussed here, however, are by no means exhaustive. For example, I spoke at an educational conference regarding Life Vision and a group of participants reported that many of the young adults in their church began to cast a vision for their lives after “being baptized with the Holy Spirit.”⁹¹ Examining the baptism of the Holy Spirit in relation to Life Vision would be an interesting study to pursue in the future. Another element in relation to Life Vision that merits future study is

⁹¹ For Charismatic believers “Baptism in the Holy Spirit” represents a subsequent ecstatic experience after the salvation event. It empowers the believer for service (Acts 1:8). Classic Pentecostals believe that this event is accompanied by speaking “in tongues” as they did in the book of Acts chapters 2,8,9,10,19.

that of the “wilderness trek.” While attending the Fund for Theological Education Vocation Training, I learned about the practice of taking young people out of their normal surroundings thus allowing them to conceive the possibilities of another world, a world that is not constrained either geographically or socially by the limits of a ghetto or a “barrio.” Once again this is a great idea that is not mutually exclusive from what I present. This could be part of the mentoring or teaching pieces I discuss later in this chapter. What I present in the following pages are significant ways that I believe the church, guided by the Spirit, can address the need that Latin@ young adults have in conceptualizing and forming a Life Vision. A major component of the framework are resources that have developed as part of my demonstration project, namely The Life Vision Bible Study and the visionforvida.org site that I will discuss in following chapter.

In my experience as a Senior Pastor, I am often asked by my church leaders to announce important events from the pulpit instead of them advising the church. These announcements could be in regards to ministerial projects, church events, fledging ministries, etc. Now, I usually prefer to concentrate on delivering only my sermons from the pulpit but I have come to realize and understand the influence and weight of my voice when communicating announcements to the church. Leaders but especially pastors are in the unique position of influencing the congregation and setting its course. Therefore, it is crucial that Latin@ church pastors realize the need for Life Vision among their young adult congregants. Once pastors and youth leaders acknowledge the need, it is imperative that they use the weight of their voice to influence, inform and educate the congregation, specifically the Latin@ young adults. Pastors and leaders have the tools for preaching, teaching, counseling and administration at their disposition in order to communicate the

importance of Life Vision to the church. Life Vision should be espoused to all in the congregation because the church as a whole must cooperate to help emerging Latin@s during this pivotal moment in their lives.

Although the scope of my project is on Latin@ young adults, I cannot fail to mention that Life Vision can be casted at any age. We see this through the stories of Abraham, Moses, Samuel and David.⁹² One of the ideas that I struggled with as I considered my project proposal was that perhaps we needed to address the need for Latin@ Life Vision as early as childhood in order to really stem the tide of aimlessness and lack of vision for their lives. I also considered that sometimes adults deal with career changes and life choices that require orientation and guidance towards a new Life Vision. Based on these observations, I conclude that there is a Life Vision for every season and addressing this need will be a necessary endeavor in the future. However, attention to the Life Vision of emerging adults is vital to any community, as they are crossing the rubicon of life and will make choices that will leave indelible marks on their lives. They are literally the next generation to impact the church and society.

Teaching And Preaching Life Vision

In the area of *kerygma* and *didache*, Life Vision deals with purpose and calling. A yearly series could be part of a Senior Pastors' or youth leaders' preaching calendar. In the previous chapter I highlight various passages that can be used for this purpose. In a church there is no greater way of bringing attention to an issue than through a sermon. Once that issue has been brought to light, there is then no better way to further explain

⁹² Abraham and Moses were called later in their lives according to Genesis 12:4 and Exodus 7:7 respectfully. Samuel was dedicated to the Lord before he was born according to 1 Samuel 1:28. Samson was also dedicated from his birth according to Judges 13:5.

concepts and facilitate questions and conversation than through teaching. The sermon or teaching should present the problem in its entirety. It should present not only the issue of aimlessness and lack of vision, but also touch on what might be some of the causes. To better develop or discuss the issues, various presentations can be done with each of the factors affecting lack of life vision. The major issues that Latin@s faced in this country should be addressed such as childhood poverty, lack of educational achievement, and racism with all its “cousins” of ethnic stereotypes and social oppression. This would be done in a number of sermons or teachings and no doubt would require a change in many of our Spanish Pentecostal churches as it would require the engagement of the world and its social and political realities from the pulpit. It necessitates that sermons not only draw parallels between the biblical text and our individual experiences, but the text and our corporate experience as Latin@ people in the United States.

We must learn from the African American church in this respect. The African American church had no recourse but to deal with the evils of an unjust country because their survival depended on it. I believe our future survival will depend on engaging unjust practices that oppress Latin@s in this country. I am glad to see that this has begun through the immigration issue, but the immigration debate has not been settled in this country. The Latin@ church must continue to be engaged in this fight. The reality is that the issue is connected to other matters Latin@s face in this country. I am aware that for many Latin@s, speaking negatively about this country would suggest that they are ungrateful or Un-American. This also is compounded with the fact that many of us come from countries that have histories of discouraging criticism of the government through demagoguery. The lie that was perpetuated in these dictatorships was that all who spoke

against the government where godless communists, but as we know this falsehood cannot be sustained, as demonstrated by the sacrifice of El Obispo Oscar Romero. Obispo Romero was assassinated in 1980 for speaking out on the atrocities committed by the Salvadorian government. At a time when many were afraid to speak, his Sunday sermons and Monday radio broadcast let people what was happening in the country.

Another reality is that although the Spanish Pentecostal Church purports to be apolitical, much of it aligns itself with American political conservatism. Conservatism tends to keep the status quo. This strips the church of its prophetic role in society. The Evangelical church as a whole tends to align itself with conservatism because it tends to keep older societal values and norms. There was a time when the United States had strong Judeo-Christian values. The problem, however, is that along with those positive values, there were also erroneous thoughts such as considering that people of color were second-class citizens. Latin@ Pastors must understand that in identifying these political issues from the pulpit does not mean they lose the appreciation they or Latin@ in general have for the United States. This should be proclaimed from the pulpit, but in order to unmask the works of Satan they also need to speak truth to power so that their people can experience a holistic liberation. As I pointed out in chapter three, “Lo Espiritual – Spiritual Realities”, there are “principalities and powers” both on the spiritual and earthly planes, that create or perpetuate social oppression that is then internalized by Latin@s. After the processes of “unmasking”, leaders can then present a course to overcome circumstances by teaming Scriptures with narratives and passages that can bring hope and help us persevere under life’s greatest pain or toughest journey. When the

work of unmasking falsehood takes place, the message of Life Vision has fertile ground in which to grow and blossom.

With the idea of overcoming circumstances, comes the idea of warfare that I previously touched on. To overcome, we must fight. The popular scripture found in 2 Corinthians, “We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ” (2 Cor. 2:10), is taught as a way to overcome sinful thoughts. However, it can also be taught as a defense to combat the negative messages about who we are that eat away at our self-esteem and in our opposition to the truth that God says about us, “we are beautifully and wonderfully made” (Ps. 139:14).

Teaching and preaching on the topic of aimlessness and issues that contribute to aimlessness, will bring awareness of the problem facing our Latin@ community and by extension our young adults. Subsequently, presenting the promise of Life Vision will help the congregation to work together to guide emerging Latin@s to the dream God has for them. Another benefit of teaching or preaching Life Vision to the church is that equipped with this teaching, parents can be supportive of their daughters and sons during this important season in their lives. The church becomes more receptive to programs that invest in emerging Latin@s.

Life Vision Groups

Also in the area of teaching, focusing exclusively on young adults through a small group study is an ideal way of communicating the truths of Life Vision and providing a more intimate setting to consider how the Lord might be leading them towards their future. A group setting will also allow the Pastor or leader to connect with the young

adults in their congregation and speak to their lives on a personal level. In my conversations with people who have walked in their Life Vision, a consistent theme among them was that they had someone in their life that believed in them. Spending the necessary time with young adults in a small group setting will communicate the idea that you believe in them loud and clear. Having this group for several weeks will allow a bond to grow between the instructor and student. The normal span of a small group is at least 6-10 weeks. The study should be done in an informal setting, as your goal is to make sure the student is relaxed, so they might share and receive freely. The group study is at the heart of the Life Vision framework because it engages the student directly and it asks them to really think about the dream God has for their lives. The group also facilitates community and accountability that encourages Life vision in an individual. Lastly, the study should contain exercises and content that will encourage the student and invite the Holy Spirit to be an active participant in their quest for Life Vision. I have created a resource for pastors and leaders who wish to start a conversation with their young adults, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

In addition to the Life Vision Bible study that I have created, Pastors', leaders and other small group facilitators can also supplement the reading material with books of Christian faith and Latin@ identity. Some authors have excellently combined these two themes. Orlando Crespo's *Being Latino in Christ* deals with embracing the richness of your Hispanic identity through your Christian Faith. Crespo points out that as Latin@ Christians sometimes we do not understand how our ethnic identity relates to our spiritual identity. Some believe that since we are Christians our ethnicity really doesn't matter. The truth, however, is that God has a purpose for "Latin@ness." Appreciating the richness of

your culture affirms God's good creation. It is also a way of finding wholeness and healing in our lives. In one of the first books of its kind, Crespo presents a vision for being Latin@ in Christ.

Karen Valetin's, "The Flavor of Our Faith: Reflections on Hispanic Life and Christian Faith", contains wonderful vignettes on Valentin's experience of faith and cultural awareness. Valentin presents a series of inspirational reflections and "cuentos", or stories, about the experience of growing up Puerto Rican and Christian in New York. With humor and wit, the book recounts an array of childhood experiences that many Latin@s can relate to. Elizabeth D. Rios's book, *Don't Buy the Lie: Eradicating False Belief Systems That Keep You From Your Destiny*, engages the reader in a down to earth style. Along with many anecdotes, she shares her personal experiences in growing up in New York City in a single parent household and attending a Latin@ Pentecostal Church. She discusses how some experiences shape our worldview and how negative ways of thinking block us from the fullness of life and destiny that Christ offers us.

Connected to belief systems, Dr. Pablo Diaz conducted a series of focus groups in a predominantly Latin@ church in Mt. Kisko, NY, to tackle the lack of self-confidence and self-esteem among Hispanics. He used as the primary text, Norman Vincent Peale's, *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Dr. Diaz developed a training program that uses the positive thinking principles taught from the pulpit and in the market place.⁹³ This is another way of conducting a group that addresses the need of self-worth in Latin@ young adults. This will in turn provide a healthy mental and spiritual environment for the development of Life Vision.

⁹³ Pablo Diaz, "Positive Thinking Through Hispanic Eyes: Building Self-Confidence And Self-Esteem Among Latinos" (DMIN diss., Drew University, 2006), 36-37.

Emerging Latin@s can greatly benefit from positive depictions of Hispanics and stories of the Latin@ experience. Along with books, film can also be used for discussion in small groups. Many pastors, including myself, have a preaching series called “God on Film” where we discuss how to see the summer’s blockbuster films from God’s perspective. The same methodology can be used to discuss Latin@ experience in movies, affirming the positive messages of the film and pointing out the false message. This type of cultural exegesis can also be done with works of literature by Latin@ American authors such as Julia Alvarez, Achy Obejas, Sandra Cisneros, Junot Diaz and Daniel Alarcón. It is important to note that some of the content of the works are not “rated G.” Therefore some discretion must be made on the selection of the material based on your context and the maturity level of your young adults. Most of the works, however, have a redemptive quality that can be used in the service of Latin@ young adults.

Networking With Other Leaders

An indispensable tool in this endeavor is “community” for the young adult, but also for those who wish to lead them to Life Vision. We can benefit from the experience of other youth workers and Pastors as they share best practices for helping young adults along in their life. Social media is another excellent tool to connect the host of leaders who serve young people. The Internet itself can also be used in the service of assisting workers in sparking vision for life. Getting connected to youth and young adult worker’s networks will strengthen the ministry towards emerging adults and give you a forum to field questions and receive mutual support. Among the many networks are, Urban Youth

Workers Institute, headed by Dr. Larry Acosta,⁹⁴ Urban Kingdom Youth Ministries (UKYM)⁹⁵ headed by Daniel Sanabria, and the Latino Leadership Circle (LLC)⁹⁶ whose president is Rev. David Ramos. These organizations are Hispanic led organizations that have an inside track on issues faced by emerging Latin@ young adults. LLC and UKYM jointly conduct a leadership training course name “ACTS – Urban Leadership Training Course,” that has now introduced a class on Life Vision that I had the privilege of crafting. Another resource that I have developed is visionforvida.org.⁹⁷ The site is dedicated to assisting Pastors and youth leaders in helping Latin@ Young Adults cast a vision for their lives. The site houses the Life Vision Bible Study, a blog and forum for the sharing of ideas. Additionally, I have created a Facebook account and a twitter page to accompany the website. These resources were created with the vision of providing a place exchange for Life Vision development among young adults. Helping our Hispanic Community in the area of aspirations, hopes and dreams must be a team effort.

One of the reasons young adults have a difficult time casting vision for their lives is that at some point in their life they were affected by the negative messages about their ethnicity. Although Latin@s are the biggest minority in the United States and have contributed significantly to America, there are negative stereotypes that are sometimes

⁹⁴ “Urban Youth Workers Institute,” Urban Youth Workers Institute, <http://uywi.org/> (accessed January 26, 2013).

⁹⁵ “Urban Kingdom Youth Ministries,” Facebook, <http://www.facebook.com/urbankingdomym> (accessed January 26, 2013).

⁹⁶ “Latino Leadership Circle: Christ, Culture, Convergence,” Latino Leadership Circle, <http://latinoleadershipcircle.org> (accessed January 26, 2013).

⁹⁷ Luis Alvarez, “Vision for Vida,” Vision for Vida, <http://visionforvida.org> (accessed January 26, 2013).

internalized by our young people. The church should be at the forefront of acknowledging the beauty of ethnicity that has its origin in the variety of God's creation. Developing cultural appreciation counters many of the messages presented by society and raises a person's self-esteem. A healthy self-esteem is an essential ingredient for the development of a Life Vision.

Developing Cultural Appreciation

Raising the cultural esteem of our emerging young adults can be done in various ways. I have discussed the group approach where Latin@ heritage is embraced. I also shared my thoughts on preaching and teaching in the church about the realities of being Latin@ in the agency of Life Vision. However, a necessary piece of the framework for leading young adults to Life Vision is standalone cultural appreciation teachings and sermons. Many young adults cannot appreciate who they are because they have lost touch with their cultural roots.

When I was growing up in a Latin@ Pentecostal Church you were not permitted to speak English from the pulpit. This was a harsh rule that created alienation for non-speaking Latin@ youth and was frankly an obstacle to the faith and discipleship of many. While the motive behind this rule could be perceived as a good rule that affirmed your ethnicity and Spanish language, I do not believe cultural appreciation should be forced, especially not by imposing linguistic requirements. An example of cultural appreciation affirming Latin@s from various generations could be addressed through the celebration of Hispanic Heritage month. Ways to celebrate include highlighting the great achievements of Hispanics, having a Hispanic Heritage Dinner where there is typical dress, music and dishes from the congregant's respective countries. This particular event

has been a great success in my congregation for several years. On a side note, although our church is Latin@ dominant, the Lord has graced us with brothers and sisters from European and African American descent, and we have also include their meals in the celebration of ethnicity. Our dinners have gone from “Hispanic Heritage Dinners” to “International Dinners.” These dinners are held on Sundays when we combine the Spanish and English services together for a bilingual worship experience.

As I noted in chapter two, “Las Causas- Social Causes,” there are several challenges faced by Latin@s in the United States, among these poverty and lack of educational attainment and ethnic oppression. In order to curtail dreamlessness and lack of vision in the lives of young adults, the church must face these problems. This was another quandary I considered when I did my project. Will confronting lack of Life Vision directly really help in stemming the problem? Another fascinating project for me would involve how the Latin@ church can confront the major problems that Latin@s face in the United States. I am encouraged by the work that the National Latino Evangelical Coalition (NaLEC)⁹⁸ and The National Hispanic Evangelical Association⁹⁹ are doing on behalf of Latin@ causes in the United States. Obviously, I came to the conclusion that their work was a worthy cause. I understood that the problems faced by Hispanics in this country and lack of Life Vision of young adults had a symbiotic relationship.

⁹⁸ “National Latino Evangelical Coalition,” National Latino Evangelical Coalition, <http://www.nalec.org/> (accessed January 26, 2013).

⁹⁹ “National Hispanic Evangelical Association,” National Hispanic Evangelical Association, <http://www.nhclc.org/en> (accessed January 26, 2013).

Education And Social Progress

Hispanics are in desperate need of narrowing the education gap between them and non-Hispanics in America. Lack of education is a major Life Vision inhibitor. The church can be an ardent supporter of education by adopting education as one of its core values.

Education is an essential tool in the spiritual, mental, social, physical growth and development of a young adult. As an agent of holistic transformation, the church is called to educate as well as encourage education. This can longer be an option for the Latin@ church, instead it has to be a priority.

The development of College Funds will help develop a philosophy of education in the church as well as provided needed financial support for students who enter college. I had the honor of serving as a Youth Pastor for many years at Macedonia Church in East Harlem, in New York City, nicknamed “el Barrio” because of its densely populated Hispanic population. One of the programs we developed was the Macedonia Youth College Fund. This department raised funds through dinners and membership offerings and provided scholarships for the youth of Macedonia Church. To help with the fundraising and encourage participation within the congregation, we invited prominent Hispanic leaders from within the church and in the community such as Rev. Rafael Reyes, Superintendent of the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God Council and Anthony Miranda, President of the National Latino Officers Association, to speak at our fundraising events. Not only did this program motivate our young people to attend college, it also inspired our older members to finish their education. An example is Martha Rivera, an immigrant of Honduras, who after many years returned back to school,

completed her Bachelors Degree and is currently finishing a Masters Program in Social Work.

The Impact of Role Models

I was also a part of Career Days where we invited Latin@ Social Workers, Police Officers, Pilots and Computer Programmers to speak about their jobs and how they were able to start their careers. Nothing inspires courage and motivation more than real life examples. When Latin@ young adults come in contact with exemplars, it can radically change their perspective on what is possible in their lives. Their role cannot be overstated. When individuals and groups were asked what they felt would help young adults believe that they could pursue God's dream for themselves, the answer consistently contained a role model. It is not surprising, for we gain strength from the stories of the saints that have come before us. Biographies of individuals who overcame adversity to triumph are the most inspiring because they convey the message "if I can, you can." Latin@ exemplars that have graduated from college and are entrepreneurs, educators, and influential leaders in the community are need in our churches. Role models are Life Vision catalysts. To complete the circle, churches can also invite reputable people in the field of real estate or finance to give a seminar on how Latin@ young adults might save for their first home or how to manage their budget. Not only will young adults benefit from these workshops, so would the community as a whole. Informational sessions like these will add to the ethos of social progress that the local church should have in order to be a Life Vision power plant.

One of the realities in the Latin@ church community in the United States is that there has been a "Brain Drain." Once young Latin@s are educated and become upwardly

mobile they leave the Latin@ church and go to “American” churches, draining intellectual capital from congregations. Rev. David Ramos, president of the Latino Leadership Circle, says that once a young adult is educated, they are exposed to other social realities. They become more acculturated to the main stream and many times the Latin@ church of their up bringing rejects them because of their education and is unable to address these new social realities.¹⁰⁰ Rev. Virginia Maldonado, Director of Education for the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God Council, believes that this can be addressed by a younger group of Pastors, who are also educated and can have parlance with those Latin@s who have become educated. Furthermore, she pointed out the need for clergy of any age to continue educating themselves to better serve the entire congregation, including educated young adults.¹⁰¹ This issue again is another project to consider. No matter what decision a young adult Latin@ makes about church attendance, it is important to continue ties with them. The reality is that they did graduate “under your watch” and could be an example for others. There are ideal situations where there are many professionals at the church and that helps the ethos of education and by extension, social progress in the church, but it is still not enough. The message can still be lost. Having professionals organize career days can give them an opportunity to serve and have contact with aspiring young adults in the congregation. The next logical step would be mentorship.

¹⁰⁰ Conversation with the Rev. David Ramos at Union Theological Seminary, New York City, April 24, 2012.

¹⁰¹ Rafael Reyes and Virginia Maldonado, interview by author, September 11, 2012, Old Tappan, New Jersey, tape recording.

Mentorships

Providing opportunities for mentorship from within and outside the congregation will charge the Life Vision engine of your young adults. Mentors are higher order Life Vision catalyst for they not only serve as role models but they sew consistently into the lives of young people. They provide accountability and much needed friendship to an emerging Latin@ young adult. Daniel Sanabria, Youth Pastor of CrossOver Youth Ministries and God Belongs in My City,¹⁰² a ministry of UKYM, grew up in the Latin@ Pentecostal Church and is the son of a Deacon and Trustee member. Daniel was a troublemaker most of his adolescence. He did poorly in school and church was a joke for him. He jokingly says, “I was the kid that Sunday School teachers had nightmares about.” Later in his teen years, Daniel had a radical encounter with Jesus that changed his life. Today, Daniel is a Latin@ young adult who graduated college, is the Principal of Park Slope Christian Academy, the Youth Pastor at Park Slope Christian Tabernacle and in my opinion, one of the most influential Youth Leaders in the City. I asked Daniel what was the leading factor in helping him become a visionary leader and he immediately responded that it was the mentors that God placed in his life and believed in God’s dream for him. These mentors did not give up on him and instead invested their time, money and prayers in what God was doing through him.¹⁰³ If the church can mentor the Daniel’s, Ana’s, Jose’s, and Maria’s of the church into adulthood, they will not only be investing in young adults but in the future of the Latin@ church.

¹⁰² “God Belongs in My City,” God Belongs in My City, <http://www.godbelongsinmycity.com/> (accessed January 26, 2013).

¹⁰³ Interview with Daniel Sanabria at Park Slope Christian Tabernacle, Brooklyn, NY, January 2013.

Conclusion

The local Latin@ church must develop an ethos of social progress consistent with its values. There is a connection between education and social progress for any group. If we believe that God has called us to "prosper even as our soul prospers" (3 John 1:2) then encouraging education, careers, good financial habits, home ownership, and other wise social practices, will help emerging adults with their future as well as benefit the Latin@ community and ultimately benefit the kingdom of God. The elements that I discussed in this chapter: awareness through teaching and preaching, instruction through teaching and Life Vision groups, networking with other Pastors and youth leaders though the Internet and social media, developing cultural appreciation, providing role models and mentoring relationships, and establishing core values of individual and social progress will equip Latin@ churches to lead their young adults to Life Vision.

CHAPTER 6 **EL PROYECTO – THE PROJECT**

This chapter is a narrative of my demonstration project “Leading Latin@ Young Adults towards Life Vision.” Included are my thoughts on the project, notable events and interactions I have had on my journey as well as the “stone” that I believe I have contributed toward the cathedral that is the Church. I must preface the following with the fact that my demonstration project was done in the backdrop of some significant events in my life. This was my first year of marriage. I had the greatest privilege of marrying the lady of my dreams, Ms. Alicia Vazquez on October 2, 2011 and concurrently blessed with becoming the step dad to a bright and creative 11 year old, Ms. Isabella Suarez (Bella). Our first family vacation was to Orlando, Florida, where we aggressively covered 6 major theme parks in 7 days, including the Holy Land Experience. My wife is my biggest fan and without her support for this project, during our first year of marriage, you would not be reading this text. On the church front was literally the “front” of Park Slope Christian Tabernacle, the church that I Pastor by God’s grace for 9 years this coming Summer. The church went through a reconstruction of its facade and lobby during the spring through fall of 2013. The building committee, Joel Cepeda, Pastor Daniel Sanabria, Daniel Rodriguez and Gilbert Vellon, oversaw the day-to-day construction and were of significant help to me. In taking a very “hands on” role with this project, Gilbert Vellon and Daniel Rodriguez were especially helpful as they managed tasks, addressed issues and supervised the work being done from start to finish.

I recognize that without their dedication and involvement, I could not have completed my demonstration project. We celebrated the facade and lobby's inauguration on October 28, 2013.

The Site Team

Before beginning my demonstration project, I selected my site team keeping in mind the experience, skills and support that each of them could offer me as pursued the question of young adult Latin@ Life Vision. Another factor influencing my selection process was the rapport and personal relationship that I shared with each person. My site team members are among the wisest and steadfast individuals that I know who are working for God's kingdom. Once again I would like to thank them for all of the support that they have given me in this process. Noemi Rodriguez, M.Ed., Educational Specialist with the NYC Board of Education for over 25 years, was helpful to me in various levels, giving me ideas in research, writing and reading much of my dissertation. Mrs. Rodriguez is one of the Deacons at Park Slope Christian Tabernacle and along with other Deacons at the church, provided me with a much needed "check-in" from time to time. In order to help me further concentrate on my project and dedicate more time to writing my dissertation, this group of Deacons also delivered, on a rotational basis, excellent Sunday sermons and/or teachings. Daniel Sanabria, BS., Marketing, Youth/Young Adult Pastor, Park Slope Christian Tabernacle and Co-Founder of "God Belongs in My City," is one of my most trusted and capable leaders. His experience and passion for youth and young adults is unmatched. His perspective on young adult ministry, current challenges facing today's young adults and the merits of mentoring young people provided me with tools that I used to build my transformational framework. Additionally, Daniel's access to a

vast Youth network in New York City and nationally were helpful at getting the word out for visionforvida.org, a site that I will share more about later in this chapter. Rosa Serrano-Delgado, LCSW, Assistant Clinical Director, Rockland Volunteer Counseling Services, has over 20 years of youth experience in the church and in the Latin@ community. Rosa was helpful in sharing articles with me and providing me with a social and psychological perspective on Latin@ youth. As the head of my site team, her experience in counseling Latin@ young adults was really instrumental in my research. Alicia Alvarez, my wife, BS, Communication and Culture is also on my site team. I thought long and hard about including her as I did not want to add any strain on our flourishing marriage. I consulted Dr. Lundy to gather her thoughts on my wife's selection and she responded that I should have her on the team only if I knew that she would be helpful with the project. After careful consideration, I'm glad I opted to include my wife on my site team. Alicia's editing, proofing and writing skills have been invaluable. My wife also has strong organizational and time-management skills, which helped to keep me on track during all aspects of this project. Lastly, her experience and personal insight on Latin@ culture proved to be extremely helpful. Rev. Jose Humphreys, MSW- Pastor of MetroHope Church, Harlem is also a site team member. Jose and I share a similar narrative as we both grew up in the Assemblies God Spanish Eastern District. Rev. Humphreys experienced a serious medical emergency in his family during 2012. Presently, by God's grace, his family member, who suffered a life-threatening disease, is now in full recovery and good health. Although Rev. Humphreys was not able to give input during the demonstration project, his comments and reflections on my proposal were highly insightful and allowed me to focus in on the research I was to do. I must

admit that my attempts to gather all of my site team in one place did not come to fruition. However, I did meet with them on an individual basis as well as consulted with them through phone calls and email correspondence. Through these forms of communication, they each enabled me to complete the project.

Park Slope Christian Tabernacle

Congregational Life Vision Teaching and Preaching

Although the scope of my demonstration project goes beyond my local church, it would ultimately be geared towards local congregations. Therefore, I was excited to share what I was learning about aimlessness and how it opposes Life Vision among Latin@ young adults with my congregation. On April 20, 2012, I gave my first Life Vision talk at my local church, at the Cross Over Young Adult Gathering, to about 35 young people in attendance. The event was held at the church social hall, which provided an informal setting, where food and beverage were served. Since I was introducing the concept of Life Vision for the first time to young adults, I opted to bring a message that highlighted the condition of many of our emergent young adults and the promise of Life Vision through Jesus. As main texts, I used Jeremiah 1:5 which says: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations,” (Jer. 1:5) and John 10:10 which says, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.” I used the findings that I had at the time to emphasize the urgency of the matter in the Latin@ community and pointed out that the enemy was robbing us of the dreams that God had for us. I ended the discussion by asking them where they were in terms of following Gods plan. I offered prayer for any young adult who needed help finding direction for their

lives and a number of them came up for prayer. I spoke to a few young adults after the message that night about Life Vision and I assured them that I planned to continue talking about this topic in the future. When some of the young adults came up to me to tell me that it was a good message, I was reminded of how many times a sermon is simply a good message but does little to change the course of an individual's life. I was determined that this would not simply be a good message, but an area of constant consideration for young adults and for the rest of congregation.

During the month of August 2012, I delivered a sermon series entitled "Life Vision," where I introduced the concept of Life Vision to the whole congregation. The series topics were: "What is Life Vision?", "How do you Get a Life Vision?", and "Life Vision for Your Family." The feedback from the series was very positive. Many commented that they had never heard anything like this teaching in the church. One young lady shared that she was able to get clarity on what she needed to do in her life after the series. Since then, this young lady accepted a paid internship offer from one of the "Big 4" accounting firms in the country and has set the wheels in motion for a career in public accounting. Another young man, who joked with me about being the "Life Vision Pastor", was a High School dropout, has now graduated with his GED and has begun his first semester in Somerset College in New Jersey.

Life Vision Small Group

At the suggestion of my Advisor, Dr. Agosto, in late fall of 2012, I began a 6 week Life Vision Small Group for young adults in my church (see Appendix 2) and took this opportunity to make use of my freshly developed Life Vision Bible Study material. We began with 10 participants. I had hoped to get equal participation of gender but the

gender breakdown was 3 females and 7 males. After introductions I set some ground rules involving attendance and civility. I made it clear that although some might have been compelled to come because I asked them personally, they should not feel obligated to attend. I emphasized that this was something they were doing for themselves because they needed clarity about their Life Vision.

Most were between the ages of 18-28 with the exception of a woman in her late 30's who asked if she could join the group. Initially, I was going to respectfully deny her admittance, but then she explained that she was recently let go from her job because of cutbacks. Further, she explained that she wanted to rediscover her Life Vision and "be what God created her to be." After understanding her situation, I allowed her into the group as I considered that this might be an opportunity to see how a study in Life Vision might be applied at different seasons in a person's life. She attended faithfully and was usually the first one in the lounge where we conducted the class. She was very grateful for the class and was able to gain a much-needed perspective of what jobs she should do apply to based on our discussions in class. She went from simply looking for a job based on her skill-set to looking for a job in which she would feel fulfilled because it was in keeping in line with her Life Vision.

As the group progressed I was able to make important revisions to the material based on the experience I had with the class. In general the members of the group were excited and looked forward to the classes. One young man never missed a session, especially after he unfortunately lost his job. Attending this Life Vision study group, allowed him to take heart and believe that God had a future for him. He explained to me

that he had been holding on to that dead-end job for years and that this was the opportunity to go back to school and finish his GED.

In one of the classes I had them speak about the time they first experienced a confirmation that they were meant to do something in particular with their lives. Some could not remember or had not yet experienced a confirmation. Others however, recalled the experience respective of the passions and life vision they were currently following. For example, some responses included a student feeling fulfilled when helping the homeless and another began a career path in Sports Journalism after meeting with a Newscaster. What I realized when listening to their responses was that some of them were just starting to get their lives together, both spiritually and with respect to their vocation.

The session I received the largest feedback from was Session 5, entitled “Who are you?” A participant noted that before the class he thought that being Puerto Rican did nothing for him. “Doing nothing for him” meant that his culture was nothing of value in this country. In this class, participants began learning how to embrace their ethnicity and culture in the light of the Scriptures.

After every group meeting, I felt a greater conviction that the young adults needed a group of this kind. The study afforded me the time to get to know some of my young adults better. I formed a closer bond with all of the participants and as such, felt a higher sense of responsibility toward them. I truly felt that the young adults in this group study were truly seeking God’s will for their lives in regard to ministry and vocation. At every class, I asked the Holy Spirit to fill in the gaps the course might have missed and God did through the sharing and conversations that took place within the group. All of the

participants shared that their Life Vision awareness had increased significantly and they were consequently taking the next steps toward their vision. Due to scheduling conflicts, many of the young adults could not attend this Fall session of the study but because of the interest that has poured in, I hope to hold another Life Vision Bible Study group in the Spring of 2013 at Park Slope Christian Tabernacle.

Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God

The project's contribution to the greater Latin@ church community reached a regional level, namely the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God (SED). I was able to meet with 3 key leaders at the SED, in the areas of general supervision of the council, education, youth and young adult, as well as conduct a Life Vision workshop at a district educational conference. Through these meetings and workshop, I was able to bring awareness of the aimlessness emerging adults face and spread the message to Pastors and key leaders that they, in collaboration with the church, must lead Latin@ young adults toward a life vision.

Meeting With Rev. Rafael Reyes and Rev. Virginia Maldonado

I had the honor of meeting with both Rev. Rafael Reyes and Rev. Virginia Maldonado at 10am on September 11, 2012 at the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God Offices in Old Tappan, NJ. I was grateful for the audience as well as the time that was given to me. Before the meeting I was invited to join the staff for Tuesday prayer and devotional lead by Rev. Reyes.

We began by discussing the workshops at the Educational Conference in May 2012 at Camp Mahanaim. Rev. Reyes was interested in the feedback that I had received from the participants at the workshops. I shared with them that there was unanimity in

understanding that there was a challenge with respect to aimlessness among youth and young adults. Additionally, I shared the different solutions that participants presented as a result of their personal experiences as well the experiences they had interacting with young adults in our district. I then expanded on what the goal of my project was, namely to develop a transformational framework that would address the mindset of aimlessness among our young adults and lead them to a life of purpose and fulfillment. I explained to them that the final product would be resource and tools such as a Bible study and a web site to help Pastors and leaders lead their young adults toward Life Vision. I took the opportunity to ask Rev. Reyes to evaluate the study after it was finished and contemplate the idea of making the study available to every Pastor and youth leader in our District and he agreed.

Rev. Maldonado asked if the goal of my project was to direct our young adults toward ministry. I explained that my project was not necessarily guiding them toward a ministry as their vocation, but rather that wanted them to discover how God had designed them to serve the world. This would include ministry, but also a mission beyond the context of the church. Furthermore, I added that many times a college education was part of the dream of God for many emerging adults. Maldonado explained that in our Hispanic community, and by extension the Latin@ church, many times parents want to get their children to graduate High School and then go into the workforce because of the family's economic situation. Sometimes, she added, parents are not aware that their child is able to go to college. They are unaware of programs that are offered to enable low-income families to send their children to college. Rev. Maldonado felt that training was needed and that the church was a good place for it. Rev. Reyes added that not only was

this type of training needed but that there was also a need to educate parents in this area. Connecting what Rev. Maldonado mentioned regarding a family's economic status, Rev. Reyes felt that families that were of lower economic status tended to encourage their children to get jobs, while those that were toward the middle class tended to encourage higher education and secular jobs in particular. Both expressed their concern regarding young adults mostly choosing secular higher education, meaning not choosing Evangelical Colleges. A few colleges were mentioned that included secular studies along with biblical and ministerial majors. Rev. Reyes explained that he understood how expensive these colleges were, also the fact that they were not known for fields of study that were not religious. Rev. Reyes was also concerned with the correlation of academic achievement and loss of faith, i.e. a person enters a secular college and loses their faith, but he conceded that it was quite possible that a person entering an evangelical institution would experience the same. He mentioned the presence of post-modernity in institutions of higher education. As a side note he suggested that I look into how post-modernity might influence Life Vision among young Latin@s, particularly the philosophy of the absurd: humankind's futile search for meaning represented in the work of philosopher Albert Camus.¹⁰⁴ Rev. Maldonado also spoke of her time as an administrator in Hostos Community College in New York City, where she observed that many Pentecostal students changed their faith or view on faith after a few semesters in college. She shared stories of students joining political clubs and engaging the social sciences and how in doing so, it changed their worldview and as a result they left their churches. Bringing the conversation back to the subject at hand, I shared that I believed that a necessary part of

¹⁰⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 1st Vintage international ed. (New York: Vintage, 1991), 8.

leading young adults toward Life Vision is encouraging them to explore, grow and learn about the world so they might come in contact with a vocation that resonates for them. For many, higher education is a “risk” that must be taken. Leaders or churches that encourage this type of exploration are those who engage the world and its complexity. Social and political engagement resonates with many young adults. Perhaps those who left their Pentecostal churches found in the University a place of world engagement that was lacking in their congregations.

The conversation shifted to issues of societal stereotypes and the reality of prejudice. Rev. Maldonado stated that many times guidance counselors are biased toward Latin@s. She shared a personal story involving her son and an experience he had with a high school guidance counselor. When her son went to the guidance counselor to explore college opportunities, the counselor instantly told him he wasn’t college material. The counselor advised her son that he needed to learn a trade and get into the workforce after he graduated from High School. Superintendent Reyes interjected, saying that [Rev. Maldonado’s family] encouraged him otherwise, affirming the point he made previously, that of family influence and socio-economic status as a predictor for a pursuit of higher education among Latin@s. Rev. Maldonado responded affirmatively.

Rev. Reyes noted that not only are some Latin@s in church in an aimless state but secular young adults as well. I explained that was certainly the case and mentioned the work of Christian Smith, which confirms that American young adults as a whole are confused and disoriented.¹⁰⁵ I posited a rhetorical question to them, whether the lack of Life Vision should be in the church, an organization whose founder is synonymous with

¹⁰⁵ Christian Smith, *Lost in Transition: the Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, USA, 2011), 226.

“the way” (John 14:6). We also discussed the uniqueness of being an emergent adult and a Latin@ in America and how being in church does not exclude you from these realities. I explained that the Latin@ church is uniquely equipped to help and lead these young adults to Life Vision. Rev. Reyes agreed with my observation.

Both expressed a concern that we were losing our young adults right after High School and that a concerted effort needed to be made before they were in High School, particularly as children. It was a good point and I shared with them that while doing research for my proposal I came across the fact that beginning to lead children toward Life Vision could play a major role in the formation of a young adult’s Life Vision. However, I believed that dealing with emergent adults at this juncture in their lives remained a vital component for life vision.

Rev. Maldonado suggested that Life Vision teaching certainly has an audience at the youth and young adult retreats in our district. These events host more than 2,000 participants, with a good percentage being young adults. Other district events such as the educational conference and the district Pastor’s Retreat could be good places to train ministers on how to help young adults in this area.

Moving to the local congregation, I posed the question, what factors make a church a good place for fostering Life Vision. Rev. Maldonado believed that the key was the Senior Pastor. She believed that the more educated Pastors spur their congregation toward educational attainment while Pastors that had little or no education, would address what traditionally might be considered the spiritual life exclusively and not bring an integrated perspective. Additionally, she noted that not only would an educated Pastor or youth leader encourage schooling, but that they would be better equipped to organize and

set up training to help young adults and their families. Rev. Reyes agreed and felt that in order for a Pastor to really encourage the seeking of Life Vision, they needed to be acquainted with certain cultural realities and concepts that only an education could provide, in essence a more educated ministry.

It is important to note that the Assemblies of God along with most Pentecostal denominations do not require formal education for ordination. The only educational requirement is a 3-year theology diploma that can be obtained through correspondence or Bible Institutes. I mentioned that one of my goals was to provide a curriculum for church leaders that they could use on a consistent basis to help young adults toward Life Vision. Although I agreed with Rev. Reyes, I hope that the tools that I provide in my demonstration project would help to fill a gap and assist many Pastors who were not recipients of higher education.

Meeting With Rev. Eddie Zaldana

In addition to Rev. Reyes and Rev. Maldonado, I had a separate meeting with Rev. Eddie Zaldana, District Youth and Young Adults Director of the SED in April 2012 in regards to my project. Rev. Zaldana was willing to help in my endeavor and is part of my website team. Rev. Zaldana, who is 33 years of age, oversees a ministry of over 5,200 youth and young adults in the North Eastern Region of the United States. Eddie also works as a social worker in New Jersey. Recently, in December 2012, he held an event called Winterfest, which drew over 3,500 youth and young adult participants. On a telephone interview with Rev. Zaldana in January 2013, we discussed the aimlessness among the young adults and the idea of Life Vision within the SED. Rev. Zaldana was in agreement that there was a great need for Life Vision in our churches. In his experience

many parents are not able to guide or even have a conversation with the children about their future because they are busy trying to provide for them. Some of them work two or even three jobs to sustain their family. For those parents who have considered higher education for their children, college seems like an unattainable goal because of the family's financial condition. Similar to Rev. Maldonado's comments, he added that many are not aware of programs available to help them or their children go to college. Rev. Zaldana is convinced that while church is helping emerging adults spiritually, it is sorely lacking in providing them guidance on how to connect the spiritual to the temporal. He says, "we show the young how to live for Jesus and how to play a musical instrument in church, but we do not address career or a vocation." He believes that this is why a lot of young adults are not becoming professionals and that our Latin@ churches lack the doctors, engineers, and psychologists. I agreed with Rev. Zaldana and shared the research that revealed that right now it is even more crucial that churches help Latin@s in education because of the educational attainment gap between Hispanics and other ethnicities.¹⁰⁶ Rev. Zaldana believes that the lack of Life Vision is connected with a bifurcated view of the spiritual and the secular. For example, he says that while most of our Pastors are bi-vocational in our district they say little or nothing about their jobs in the world. It is almost as if they do not want to mix who they are in the world and who they are in the church. Rev. Zaldana points out the lack of value placed on job life or career in many Latin@ Pentecostal churches. The message then becomes that career is not important or at the very least you are on your own when you're out there. Rev. Zaldana believes that the church needs to present a holistic Christian worldview. He says

¹⁰⁶ Barna Group, 28.

the church always has a vision for expanding the building, but what we really need is a vision for expanding the lives of our young adults. He says, “we need to “build whole people” before we build physical structures”, “if we do this, our young people will be able to cast a vision for their lives.” He also touched on the role of exemplars. He shared an experience about a Dominican young man he brought to speak at his local church to youth and young adults, who was 28 and was a practicing physician. He shared where he had come from and his struggles and finally being able to achieve his dreams of becoming a doctor. After the message a young lady was motivated to follow her dream and applied to Seaton Hall University and a few months later, was accepted. The idea says Rev. Zaldana, is that we must show our young adults that they can make it. Lastly, I asked him what helped him find his Life Vision. He says that he began appreciating who he was and what his parents had done for him. Some how he realized that there was a course that his parents had laid for him by coming from Guatemala to the United States. He understood that their hard work was for a reason and he wanted to continue to advance his family. That coupled with his love for helping young people, lead him to a profession in social work. In support of my project, Rev. Zaldana is looking at updating the SED Youth Site by adding visionforvida.org as one of the resource links.

Life Vision Workshops

On May 19, 2012, I had the privilege of presenting two “Leading Young Adults Toward Life Vision” workshops, one in English and the other in Spanish at the Spanish Eastern District (SED) 2012 Educational Conference at Camp Mahanaim. Two of my site team members: Alicia Alvarez and Rosa Serrano-Delgado, helped me organize the workshop and were on hand to provide support.

The workshop was composed of a lecture and group sessions. The lecture explained the current condition of aimlessness among many of our Latin@ young adults. I spoke on the socio-economic and spiritual impact on the church. I discussed the concept of Life Vision and the unique position the Latin@ church has in respect to fostering a Life Vision rich environment, what I call a Life Vision Power Plant. The other component of the workshop was interspersed group sessions where participants interacted with one another by discussing their ideas on how we can help young adults in this vital aspect of their lives. During this time they shared their personal stories of Life Vision and experiences with those they served by answering group discussion questions.

The prominent themes shared by participants in the workshops were: the need to build self-esteem, the importance of role models and the critical role of mentors in the life as young adults. The latter, the role of mentors, was the subject that garnered the highest number of testimonials after I introduced the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman's "The Sound of the Genuine",¹⁰⁷ which I became acquainted with at the Fund for Theological Education Vocation Care Training. Thurman's work compels us to listen to the "sound of the genuine" in ourselves. That is "the voice" that tells us who we really are and who we are meant to be. One of the group discussion questions was: "who helped you hear the voice of the genuine in your life?" Passionately, many shared how Pastors, teachers and leaders had called out the voice of the genuine in them at key moments in their lives. At these moments they caught a glimpse of who they really were and who they eventually would become.

¹⁰⁷ Lewis, Stephen, Courtney Cowart, Dori Baker, and Mitchell Clement. *The Fte Guide to Vocation Care*. Decatur: The Fund for Theological Education, 2012. <http://www.fteleaders.org/pages/fte-guide-to-vocationcare> (accessed September 4, 2012).

I conducted my first workshop in English with over 75 participants. A quick introduction by workshop attendees revealed that a good number of them were young adults who were involved in youth and young adult ministry. Others were Senior Pastors and Sunday School staff members. The site team and I found that the participants were very receptive to the ideas presented and resonated with the fact of aimlessness among young adults. They were also in agreement with some of the Life Vision catalysts that I discussed in the workshop. This group was also very interested in a website or social media resource that could help them with the issue of Life Vision with those they served. I assured them that I was working on a website and were welcomed to download the Life Vision Study resources once completed.

The second workshop in Spanish drew around 50 participants and was composed of mostly middle aged and older church volunteers and ministers but very little were involved in youth ministry. It also included mostly Senior Pastors and Sunday School Superintendents. I was graced by the presence of Rev. Dr. Domingo Valdez, Director of Missions for the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God, and an Executive Member of the SED. There was a sense of agreement with respect to the challenges of Life Vision, but the solutions presented were often one-dimensional. For example one participant believed that if we helped young adults with their self-esteem it would stem the problem of aimlessness. Another testified that they had issues of this sort in their congregation but when their young adults were filled with the Holy Spirit their lack of direction became a non-issue. These answers are emblematic of the approaches taken to address this challenge. Addressing the issue by dealing with self-esteem represents a therapeutic approach that certainly has merit. What one thinks of oneself will frame or set the

boundaries for Life Vision. The characteristically Pentecostal answer of being filled with the Holy Spirit to bring Life Vision might seem on the surface to be overly spiritual. This experience has been touted by many to be the solution for a Christian's lack of authority and power, but if one considers that the Spirit brings life (John 6:63), the sister who shared this is on to something here. In the first chapter of the book of Acts Jesus tells his disciples that they would receive power when the Spirit came upon them and that they would be his witness all over the world (John 1:8). This endowment of the Holy Spirit was not for salvation but for service. It gave the early church clarity and power to carry out the Christ's Great Commission. Oh that we would allow the Spirit to move in such a way in our lives that the Lord would empower and illuminate God's vision for our lives.

After both conferences, I asked participants to share their emails if they would be interested in receiving material to help them in conducting a Life Vision group in their local ministry settings. I received emails from 100% of those that responded to the survey. I created a Life Vision email list that I used to inform them of the site and the availability of a study to assist Pastors and leaders in this endeavor.

ACTS Urban Leadership Training Course

Another component of what the project proposed to offer the churches was the integration of Life Vision into the Latino Leadership Circle (LLC) ACTS Urban Leadership Training Course. Every year LLC, in partnership with Urban Kingdom Youth Ministries, conducts a dynamic 14-week program designed to equip youth leaders, ministers and volunteers. The program provides cutting edge training for those involved on the front lines of Urban Ministry. Professionally trained and experienced ministers, social workers and marketplace leaders, conduct sessions on the tools necessary for youth

and young adult ministry. A serendipitous event occurred at a LLC support meeting in February 2012. President David Ramos was contacted by the Fund for Theological Education (FTE). FTE had long been an ally of the work that LLC was doing in the New York City area and was inviting us to take part of a Vocation Care Training Course in Asheville, North Carolina the week of March 12, 2012. The idea was that LLC could provide vocation care to the number of young adults that we serve. LLC was very interested in participating and this training aligned perfectly with my demonstration project. As I discuss in previous chapters, vocation or calling is major component to Life Vision. Although this was not in my demonstration project schedule, this was definitely a training that I needed to attend.

During the week of March 12, 2012, I left Memphis, Tennessee on other business and flew into North Carolina where I missed my flight to Asheville. I stayed the night in a nearby airport hotel and caught the earliest flight the next morning. After arriving I checked into the hotel and made my way to training venue. Travel complications did not allow me to get to the training on time but once I got there and introduced myself to the group I was greeted by over 50 participants saying, “I see you.” Needless to say, it felt a bit odd, but the presence of my LLC colleagues scattered around the room assured me that I had not stumbled into a meeting of some type of cult. The training was a combination of short lectures explaining what was being done and breakout sessions in groups where we shared about our lives and asked questions around our calling and what brought us to what we were currently doing. Initially, I felt the questions were too invasive as I was asked to share my deepest thoughts about where I felt I was in life and ministry to strangers. Some of my apprehension could have been due in part to missing

an informal meet and greet the night before and not establishing connections with the participants or perhaps it was due to the fact that I was exhausted. As time passed however, I felt a bit more at ease sharing my life story. The training was an actual vocation care retreat for the participants, which I did not expect and so the methodology was learning by doing. The style of the class turned out to be one of its benefits to me as I was able to consider where I stood in my vocation. One of the gleanings for me was that there were things in ministry that I used to do that would bring me life but I was neglecting those things for the tasks I felt needed to get done.

The structure of the training was based on the acrostic “CARE.” “C” stands for creating a space to explore Christian vocation together. This was demonstrated in the informal group setting and dynamics. “A” stands for asking self-awakening questions. This was practiced through asking one another deep questions about our life and ministry in smaller groups of 2-3 people. “R” stands for reflect theologically. This was done through evocative Scripture reading and theological prose. This “E” stands for enact the next faithful step. This was practiced through a step called design studio. In this step groups of participants were asked to design a project in keeping with their vision of ministry.

The Vocation Care Training informed my Life Vision project by providing a methodology to help participants consider calling in their lives and creating a space so transformation can occur. I experienced an excellent time of fellowship with my LLC friends as we took in the sights and cuisine of the eclectic and artsy city of Asheville. The Asheville experience resulted in LLC being awarded a \$22,000 grant to do vocation care. This gave us the opportunity of revamping the LLC ACTS – Urban Leadership Training

Course to ACTS 2.0. I am happy to report that a chapter on Life Vision (see Appendix 3) has been added to the new curriculum. The curriculum will be taught by youth leaders, mostly Latin@ leaders from Pentecostal Churches. It is a 2 ½ hour version of the Life Vision Bible Study program and although most of the participants are Latin@ some may not be, so the curriculum was adapted to be used in a multicultural context. This is a major win in helping Latin@ young adults toward a vision for their lives as the ACTS programs is now training over 100 youth leaders yearly. Recently, LLC has started ACTS training in New Jersey and in Florida. One of my evaluation goals for the project was that the Life Vision curriculum would receive 95% acceptance from the ACTS Curriculum team and that it would be put in the next version of ACTS. Life Vision received 100% acceptance. I will be teaching this session in the spring of 2013 ACTS 2.0 training in the New York area.

Life Vision Bible Study

In an effort to continue to empower churches in the work of leading young adults to Life Vision, we created a Life Vision Study to help leaders and Pastors spend time with young adults as they lead them to Life Vision. The curriculum team was composed of Alicia Alvarez, Noemi Rodriguez and Maria Vellon. This study is a vital component to the transformational framework that I presented in the chapter entitled “La Iglesia – The Church.” There are two versions of the study: an instructor version and a student version. The instructor version contains directions to conduct the class as well as answers to the fill in questions presented to the students. I began cobbling together ideas for this study through out my research process. My goal was to make the material accessible and useful for Pastors and youth leaders. The curriculum methodology is based on “Making Group

Bible Study Transformational” by Dan Lentz. The study is divided into 6-week group sessions, which include:

1. What is Life Vision?
2. My Ministry and My Mission
3. Gifts, Abilities and Dreams: Part 1
4. Gifts, Abilities and Dreams: Part 2
5. Who are you?
6. Walking Through the Door

Session 1 establishes the tone of the group by incorporating exercises that give everyone in the group a voice. The purpose is to communicate the personal value of every individual. It teaches introspection and introduces students to the concept of Life Vision. Session 2 focuses on the calling God has placed on you to the world and the ministry you are given to serve the body of Christ. It contains biblical examples of individuals who were called by God and how their stories teach us about the nature of the calling. Session 3 and 4 deal with the gifts and the dreams God has placed in us. Major markers of Life Vision are the dreams and gifts that we have. These sessions allow the student to take stock of those charisms and it guides them on how to hear from God regarding these. It also points to Life Vision catalyst that God has placed around us. Session 5 gives the student tools for cultural appreciation and defense against the robbing of Life Vision through false messages. It is the most emotive session for the group as it deals with racial stereotypes and ethnic beauty, topics that are seldom heard in our churches. Session 6 encourages the student to take the next steps in following their Life Vision. The last exercise, entitled, “Walking into the Future” is one of the most significant in the course as it invites the student to imagine God’s future for them.

Vision For Vida Site

The Life Vision Study is accessible through the Vision for Vida site at visionforvida.org. “Vida” means life in Spanish and I selected Vision for Vida as the name of the site in order to give it a Latin@ flavor. As part of the project I wanted to leverage my skills as a web developer to bring added value to my project and as a means to facilitate the transformational framework that I was proposing. I am very grateful to my friend, professional photographer, Joseph Dominick Martinez for permitting me to use some of his work on the site. The web site team is Alicia Alvarez, Rev. Eddie Zaldana, and Rosa Serrano-Delgado. Each provided helpful input to the design and content of the site. We purchased the domain visionforvida.org and visionforvida.com early in 2012 and established an Internet presence through a Facebook and Twitter page in May 2012 and went live in late December 2012. The Facebook site is facebook.com/visionforvida and the Twitter site is twitter.com/visionforvida. Both the site and social media sites reference one another. We decided to make visionforvida.org the primary place for housing content for the project as it awarded the most flexibility. The site is composed of the following pages:

- Home
- About
- What is Life Vision?
- Life Vision Bible Study
- Life Vision Sermons
- Life Vision Strategy
- Forums
- Blog
- Contact Us

- Search

There is a navigation pane on the left that contains a button menu. The expandable “*Resources” button contains the “Life Vision Bible Study”, “Life Vision Sermons” and “Life Vision Strategy” content. Under the menu in the navigation pane there is a Twitter feed and below the feed, links to Vision for Vida social media sites. The “Home” page explains what the site is all about and on the third paragraph of that page I speak of the importance of the Life Vision Bible Study and provide a quick link to the study resources. The idea here was not to have the user spend time searching for study.

Besides the common pages found on websites such as “About” and “Contact Us”, I would like to highlight some of the pages that we thought would be helpful toward the Life Vision framework. The “Life Vision Bible Study” page is the heart of the site. It contains downloadable files in PDF format of the instructor and student versions of the study with the latest revision date. As part of the strategy for the study, we wanted to make an electronic document that could be expanded and developed over time. At the bottom of the page there is a link to the feedback forum of the site. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, I preached a series of Life Vision sermons at my church and I have made them available for download in PowerPoint format in the “Life Vision Sermons” page. We thought it would be useful to give leaders these tools to present Life Vision to their congregations. Some sermons are in Spanish or English or both. As a means of communication and feedback we provided a “Forums” page to share experiences, provide input for the Life Vision Study, and simply for visitors, Pastors and youth leaders to ask for help. This page facilities the networking component of the transformational framework. This and the Facebook page will provide networking and collaboration for churches and individuals interested in helping young adults. Lastly, there is our blog

page, which complements the forum by providing us a vehicle for highlighting helpful resources and getting feedback from the site viewers.

Conclusion

There were some logistical challenges faced during the project as some pieces were dependent on others thus causing delays. I met with gatekeepers much later than I expected because of scheduling conflicts and summer vacations. The website launched later than expected, as we tried to launch the site with a substantial amount of resources, but we needed to finish pieces of the research to do it. I had originally wanted to do 4 district workshops with Life Vision but time only allowed for 2 sessions. The Life Vision Preaching and Life Vision group was not planned and in hindsight should have been part of my proposal. I believe they were of great benefit to my local congregation and lent great insight to the project by providing me a staging area for the concept of Life Vision. In summary, I am confident that the project was a success and a great opportunity for me to consider the question of aimlessness among our young adult population and develop tools to assist local congregations in leading their emerging adults to Life Vision. These tools provide a transformational framework to turn visionless young adults to vision rich young adults and as result advance the Latin@ Pentecostal church in the United States and ultimately the kingdom of God.

CHAPTER 7 **DICHO Y HECHO – EVALUATION**

This chapter will evaluate the project based on the goals set in my project proposal. I will also discuss the ministerial competencies that I have developed during the project's duration. Toward the end I will briefly discuss what might be next beyond the scope of the project. My goals were as follows:

1. To raise awareness in the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God (SED) regarding the lack of life direction and aimlessness among Latin@ church youth and young adults as well as the need to address this issue in SED.
2. Compose a team of 5-7 people that will assist me with the development of a transformational framework that will bring Life Vision to Latin@ youth and young adults.
3. The Team will develop the transformational framework.
4. The Team will develop an Internet presence.

Associated with each goal were strategies. In the pages to follow, I will discuss the goals and their strategies, and provide a description of the events that transpired during each implementation of the strategy. In the case where strategies were modified, I will provide reasons for the alternate routes taken to achieve the goal at hand. In some cases, at the request of my advisor, my site team or an opportunity to enhance my research, I embarked on activities that I will also include in this chapter.

Goal 1 - To Raise Awareness in the Spanish Eastern District Assemblies of God (AG)

To raise awareness regarding the lack of direction and aimlessness among Latin@ youth and young adults, I decided to speak to the gatekeepers that directly affect the course of our young adults in the SED. My first strategy was to speak to Rev. Rafael Reyes, Superintendent of SED Assemblies of God. As Superintendent and overseer, Rev. Reyes is the highest-level minister in SED. As I shared in the previous chapter, Rev. Reyes graciously granted me a meeting with him at the offices of the Spanish Eastern District. He was very encouraging and suggested other areas of research and questions that could further assist me with the project, including considering the question of postmodern young adult culture and its influence on Life Vision. I shared with him that I would be preparing resources for Pastors and leaders that would help them in their local congregation to tackle this issue. I asked if he would, after reviewing the resources, consider promoting these resources to SED Pastors and district leaders. He agreed that if after reviewing the Life Vision materials, he approved, he would consider making them available to the district clergy.

Along with Rev. Reyes, Rev. Virginia Maldonado, Director Education of SED also joined us in the meeting. Rev. Maldonado oversees the many campuses of the SED Bible Institutes and the Spanish Eastern School of Theology, a Bible college associated with the Assemblies of Gods Global University. She also coordinates the various educational trainings and seminars in SED, including the annual SED Educational Conference held at Mahanaim Camp in Swan Lake, New York. This event draws Pastors, leaders, and educators from all over the SED and Regional Pentecostal Latin@ churches. As the chief educator of SED, she could facilitate seminars and workshops to help the

effort of Life Vision in young adults well as provide advice and feedback of the resources provided by my project. Rev. Maldonado was very helpful, providing personal anecdotes of her experiences with education as an Assistant Director in Hostos Community College. She also shared valuable stories of the Latin@ community that she has served for over 25 years as an Associate Pastor with her husband in Bronx, New York. She kindly provided me with the opportunity to speak at two workshops at the SED Educational Conference in May 2012 regarding Life Vision and has asked me to share in future conferences and workshops in the SED.

My second strategy towards achieving my awareness goal, was not only to meet with Rev. Maldonado but also with the District Youth and Young Adult Director of the SED, Rev. Eddie Zaldana. Rev. Zaldana provided me with some useful statistics. He ardently confirmed what my research showed regarding young adults and aimlessness in the Latin@ church community. Rev. Zaldana and his staff are in the process of redoing the youth and young adults department website. In an effort to encourage education, he will be adding resources that will help those entering college. Rev. Zaldana asked if he could place the visionforvida.org site on the site's resource links and I agreed. To further collaborate in the effort of promoting education and Life Vision, Rev. Zaldana consented to be a part of the advisory team for the visionforvida.org site. He saw a great need for this type of message among our youth and young adults. Rev. Zaldana was an important person in this strategy, and based on our conversations, he will be encouraging those he serves to integrate their faith in the quest of a vocation. I am excited at the prospect of having Life Vision as one of the emphasis of SED Young and Young Adult Ministries in the future.

My third strategy in my awareness goal was to conduct a workshop at the SED Educational Conference and other District or Sectional Meetings. After discussing my project with Rev. Virginia Maldonado in November 2011, the SED granted me two workshops at the May 2012 Educational Conference (see Appendix 1). My topic fell perfectly in line with the general theme of the conference, which was, “Nuestra Jornada Comienza Aqui” or “The Journey Begins Here” (see Appendix 2). I saw this as “divine timing” as the emphasis of the conference was helping young people traverse life’s journey through Christian Education. These conferences affirmed that the SED believed that the aimlessness among our young adults was an important topic to address with Pastors and leaders in the district. The workshops also gave me a platform to convey the message of the need to intentionally lead our emerging adults toward Life Vision on a district level. Those in attendance were District Leaders, Bible Institute Principles and Teachers, Sunday School Teachers, Small Group Leaders and Youth Leaders and Pastors.

The success of achieving Goal 1 is measured through the strategies I set forth in my proposal. To measure the success of the first and second strategies, I sought to meet with 90% of my targeted audience. In evaluating my success, I reached 100% compliance and was able to meet with all those I planned to meet with. To measure the success of strategy three, I planned to conduct at least 4 workshops in the SED, including the SED educational conference. I conducted two workshops at the SED conference, one in Spanish and the other in English. I was not able to secure the two additional workshops that I had proposed. Instead, I turned my attention to my local church by conducting a Life Vision small group at the Young Adults gathering, where we had local and young adults from the greater New York City Area. Also, as I shared in the narrative chapter, I

did a four-week sermon series on Life Vision (see Appendix 4)¹⁰⁸ and held a six-week Life Vision Group for Young Adults (see Appendix 5) at my local church. Lastly, another measure of success for completing goal one, was evaluated through the feedback collected via a brief post questionnaire at the end of each workshop, meeting and small group that would address whether or not the individual had an increased level of awareness towards the lack of vision and aimlessness affecting our Latin@ youth (see Appendix 3). At least 50% needed have answered in the affirmative. At the SED workshops, 99% responded in the affirmative. At my congregation I had the congregants give me feedback on all the Life Vision sermons and teaching and 93% responded that their awareness increased.

Goal 2 – Composing A Team

Goal 2 was to compose a team of 5-7 people that will assist in the development of a transformational framework that will bring life vision to Latin@ young adults. Strategy one of this goal, was to create criteria to select a curriculum and web site. We decided that the criteria that I used in selecting the site team, was precisely the criteria that we needed for the transformational framework. Upon selecting my site team, I needed a mixture of people that: 1) had an expert understanding of education, 2) had experience in young adult ministry, 3) was engaged in young adult ministry, 4) had experience in the Latin@ Pentecostal Church, 5) a good understanding of Latin@ culture in the United States context, 6) was well versed in the psychological and social aspects of culture. Since we already had members on our site team that would be well suited for the task, I asked them to help with the framework. Additionally, because my proposal had different

¹⁰⁸ Appendix 4 contains the first sermon in the series for full list visit <http://visionforvida.org/life-vision-presentations/>

teams, such as the site, curriculum and framework, and Internet teams, I decided that it was in the project's best interest to consolidate the different teams. It was better to have members of my site team as well as those who I had asked assistance of that were part of the curriculum and Internet teams to contribute in any area they saw fit. To the Internet team, I added Rev. Eddie Zaldana, District Youth and Young Adult Ministry Director and to the curriculum team, I added Maria Vellon, Deacon and chairperson of the Park Slope Christian Academy. Besides her vast experience in local church ministry, Mrs. Vellon brought over 30 years of experience with the board of education as teacher and administrator.

Strategy 2 of this goal was to select and orient the team. After selection of the team I was not able to have group meetings, but I was able to meet individually with them and also correspond through email to gather their thoughts on the framework. In the case of Daniel Sanabria, Mrs. Rodriguez and Mrs. Vellon, I was able to meet with them in local church and discuss the status of the framework and the project on a regular basis. The meetings provided me with greater clarity and encouragement as well filling the team in on my progress. In most cases members were clear on the role they could play and the assistance they could offer me.

Goal 3 – Develop A Transformational Framework With The Team

Goal 3 of my project was that the team would develop a transformational framework. Strategy 1 of this goal was to have a specialist speak to us on how to develop a transformational framework. This was not possible. Instead we made use of “Making Group Bible Study Transformational” by Dan Lentz as well as my course work in the Doctor of Ministry Leadership seminar. Applying experiences in the area of ministry,

technology, education and social work, we developed a framework that would be able to produce palpable results and would grow as needed. Our definition of a transformational framework for Life Vision was a set of values and strategies that churches could adopt to change the mindset or aimlessness of emerging Latin@s as discussed in Chapter 5.

Success towards completing goal 3 can also be measured through the completion of strategy 2 in which the curriculum for Vision for Vida was created. We decided to rename it *Life Vision Study*, as all young adults and leaders would better accept this terminology. In order to have the material more accessible to pastors and youth leaders we named it a “Study”, with an instructor version and a student version. The instructor version would have directions on how to conduct the study as well some recommendations for the course. The study was finished in the fall of 2012. To accommodate the Latino Leadership Circle ACTS Urban Leadership Training (ACTS), we created a version of the study that could be done in 2 ½ hours. This version is aimed at Leaders who will be conducting Life Vision Groups in their local congregations (see Appendix 6). Although the ACTS students are mostly Latin@, there are students of other nationalities. The ACTS material was modified to be inclusive of all ethnicities. Also, we created a more comprehensive six-week group study, aimed at Latin@ Pastors and young adult leaders (see Appendix 7).¹⁰⁹

In order to measure the success of Goal 3, I wanted the study to receive 95% acceptance from the ACTS Curriculum Team and subsequently have the curriculum slated for integration in the next version ACTS (ACTS 2.0). The Life Vision study received 100% acceptance at the ACTS curriculum meeting, September 14-15, 2012. It is

¹⁰⁹ Appendix 7 contains the Life Vision Instructor version.

in the upcoming ACTS 2.0 training this spring.

Goal 4 – Team Develops An Internet Presence

Goal 4 of my project was that the team would develop an Internet presence. Strategy 1 was to establish Facebook and Twitter sites and we successfully, did this through a Facebook (see Appendix 8) and Twitter page (see Appendix 9) in May 2012. The second strategy is that we would develop an Internet site. We purchased the domain *visionforvida.org* and *visionforvida.com* early in 2012 and began development late fall of 2012.

The evaluation of success for Goal 4 was that *Vision for Vida* site would be operational within the period of the demonstration project and as such, the site was launched late 2012 (see Appendix 9). Another goal was that the Internet site would receive at least 150 hits within the first 6 months of its inception (combined Facebook and website). As of date, the *visionforvida.org* site has had 163 unique visitors (see Appendix 10). The Vision for Vida page on Facebook page has 75 likes. However, the Twitter following has a ways to go with only 4 followers. The low number of followers could be due to the fact that the majority of the people that we have reached out to do not make use of Twitter accounts. Nevertheless, our evaluation goal was reached with over 242 combined hits. One of our last evaluations to measure the success of Goal 4 was that we would have the Life Vision curriculum group study available for download at the *Vision for Vida* site by September 2012. As I discussed in the project narrative, Chapter 6, dependencies did not allow us to reach the proposed download date, but as of the launch of the site in December 2012 both the Life Vision Instructor and Student versions are available for download at *visionforvida.org* under the resources menu.

Competencies for Development

The competencies that I chose to develop, in agreement with my site team, during the project were in the areas of a worship leader and a pastor.

Worship Leader

With regard to a worship leader, I was to develop meaningful rituals and traditions that would be touchstones for young adults in the *Life Vision Study*. The rituals were meant to help build a deeper sense of ethnic and spiritual identity as well as encourage completion. Strategy 1 was to have 3 consistent sets of events or rituals around significant moments in the Life Vision study.

The evaluation of this strategy is that these rituals would be written in the instructor portion of the study. In the Life Vision Study Instructor version there are several directives given to the instructors throughout the study. At each session there is a “check in” time. In the first session the student shares why they are taking the course. In the subsequent sessions they are asked to share something significant that happened during the week. This is done to build community as well as give students an opportunity to pray for one another’s needs. The other ritual in the Life Vision group is that after anyone shares at the beginning of the session, people in the group say “te veo” or “I see you.” This is to affirm the student and to highlight the fact their words are of value in the group. Lastly, prayer before and after the class is part of each session in the study.

Another strategy to develop competency as a worship leader was to create a Life Vision pledge and graduation ceremony. The Life Vision pledge and Life Vision Graduation Ceremony can be found on the last two pages of the Life Vision Study Instructor version (see Appendix 6). The evaluations of these strategies were that both the

pledge and the graduation ceremony be submitted to the site team for review by the summer of 2012. However, both were submitted to the team at a latter date closer to the release of the visionforvida.org site and Life Vision Study.

Pastor

The site team believed that my role as a bi-vocational Pastor led to a very busy lifestyle and as such, they recommended I develop as a competency an intentional practice of self and familial care. The strategies identified to achieve such care were:

1. Two 2-day personal retreats every year.
2. Medical check ups every 6 months.
3. An exercise regimen that will include seasonal activities.
4. Three family vacations a year.
5. Family devotional night.
6. Family recreational night.

Meeting on a quarterly basis with members of my site team and discussing my progress on these strategies would form the basis of my evaluation. In regard to strategy 1, I did not take 2 personal retreats. In retrospect this probably was not a good idea just being newly married. The number of vacation days I had left to use from work was also a limiting factor also. However, I did take the spirit of the strategy, which was to spend some time alone with God. During our vacations and getaways, I was able to have moments of solitude where I read, studied, prayed and contemplated God. Those times refreshed my soul and mind. I had regular medical check ups, which included a full physical exam and dental care. Although I engaged in seasonal activities, such as swimming, hiking and bike riding, I did not carry out my exercise regimen as proposed. I

hope to get back on my regimen after my final submission of my thesis paper.

As far as family, this has been one of the most enjoyable times in my life. We had our first family vacation in Orlando, Florida, had a long weekend getaway at the Renaissance Fair, and a first year anniversary trip to Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic. I must credit my exceptional wife for planning all of our trips. Prior to her, I would go years without a proper vacation. As a result of her planning and watchful eye, I feel less weary and consistently refreshed physically, mentally and emotionally. During the year we had regular devotional and recreational nights. There are times we forgot to slot in a devotional night, but we consistently pray around the table and discuss God with our daughter Bella. Recreational nights were usually spent playing video or board games and watching television. One of the highlights of my week is watching “Once Upon a Time,” and “Downton Abbey” on Sundays with my family.

The Future of Latin@ Leading Young Adults Toward Life Vision

Throughout this work I have intimated on endeavors that may be spawned from this project and some possible complements to it. In the following paragraphs I describe a number of them.

As I stated previously, I created the visionforvida.org site because I wanted to bring my professional abilities as a web developer to the project. I believe that the web offers an excellent means for the distribution of ideas and public interaction. Another important reason for introducing the Internet in the project was to give it an opportunity to live beyond its duration and perhaps beyond its creator. The site provides a community in cyberspace for churches or organizations who wish to partner in the cause of leading Latin@s young adult toward Life Vision. In technological language, the cause is

“scalable”. It is built with the ability to grow and adapt as needed. As I described in Chapter 6, visionforvida.org has been created to distribute the *Life Vision Study*, facilitate feedback on the study, provide a space for mutual help and encouragement, and share valuable resources for those who minister to Latin@ young adults. Additionally, I am currently in conversation with ministerial colleagues that have created curriculum to prepare students for college and for the workforce as they can help provide the next steps to young adults after the *Life Vision Study*. I hope to have these on the site as additional resources in the near future.

I noted in this chapter that a shortened version of the *Life Vision Study* is now part of The ACTS Urban Youth Leadership Training program, a fourteen-week course held every year in New York, New Jersey and Florida. I will be conducting the first ACTS Life Vision class in New York in May 2013. The Life Vision class is an introduction to the concept of Life Vision for leaders and will encourage leaders to use the framework, detailed under the “Life Vision Strategy” page, under “*Resources” tab, found in visionforvida.org site.

I was pleased to receive an email correspondence from Rev. Virginia Maldonado, which stated that after reading the *Life Vision Study*, she would be presenting the study to Executive Committee of the SED to see what can be done to get the material in the hands of our pastors and youth leaders. This endorsement means a great deal, as the study can potentially be used in training and in seminars in the District. My Life Vision Workshops have also opened doors for me to speak to pastors and leaders in my denomination. I have been invited to speak at the pastors’ retreats as well as future educational conferences.

The National Evangelical Latino Coalition (NALEC) has agreed to get the word

out about the visionforvida.org site. We reached out to Rev. Gabriel Salguero, President of NALEC, and in an email correspondence he agreed to share the website with all of the NALEC members. The National Evangelical Latino Coalition is an organization dedicated to educating Hispanic Evangelicals around public policy and issues that contribute to the common good.¹¹⁰ This can potentially expose the cause of leading emerging Latin@s to Life Vision to a national level.

The concept of Life Vision has sparked ideas among my colleagues in ministry. Daniel Sanabria has proposed one of the more interesting visions. We have begun dreaming about how we can set up “Life Vision Centers” around Brooklyn. These centers would conduct classes that would help young adults transition into adulthood. These centers would provide the Life Vision Groups, GED classes, college preparation, employment training, and most importantly a community of support in neighborhoods in desperate need of hope and a future. This endeavor is exciting, as it would bring the message of Life Vision beyond the walls of the church.

¹¹⁰ “National Latino Evangelical Coalition,” National Latino Evangelical Coalition, <http://www.nalec.org/> (accessed January 26, 2013).

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Workshop Confirmation Letter

SPANISH EASTERN DISTRICT ASSEMBLIES OF GOD



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
REV. VIRGINIA MALDONADO, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION
213 OLD TAPPAN ROAD • OLD TAPPAN, NEW JERSEY 07675-7049
TEL: (201) 358-9142 • FAX: (201) 358-9295
WEBSITE: SEDAGEDU.ORG – Email: vmaldonado.sedag@live.com

22 de noviembre de 2011

Rev. Luis D. Álvarez, Jr.
2621 Palisades Avenue, #2G
Riverdale, NY 10463

Apreciado Rev. Álvarez:

"Entonces Jesús dijo a sus discípulos: Si alguno quiere venir en pos de mi, niéguese a sí mismo, y tome su cruz y sígame..." Mateo 16:24

Para mí es un privilegio dirigirme a usted. Espero que este gozando de las ricas y abundante bendiciones junto a su esposa y congregación.

La presente de esta es para informarle acerca de la Convención de Educación del Departamento de Educación del Distrito Hispano del Este.

Tema: Nuestra Jornada Comienza Aquí...

Texto Tema: Mateo 16:24

Lugar: Campo Mahanaim

Fecha: 18-19 de mayo de 2012

Su participación será la siguiente:

Fecha	Tema	Grupo	Hora
Sábado, 19 de mayo	Leading Young Adults Toward Life Vision	Youths, Youth Pastors, Counselors and youth SS teachers	10:30 am –12:00 pm English
Sábado, 19 de mayo	Guiando Nuestros Jóvenes a una Visión de Vida	Jóvenes, Pastores, Consejeros y maestros de Jóvenes	12:00-1:30 pm Spanish

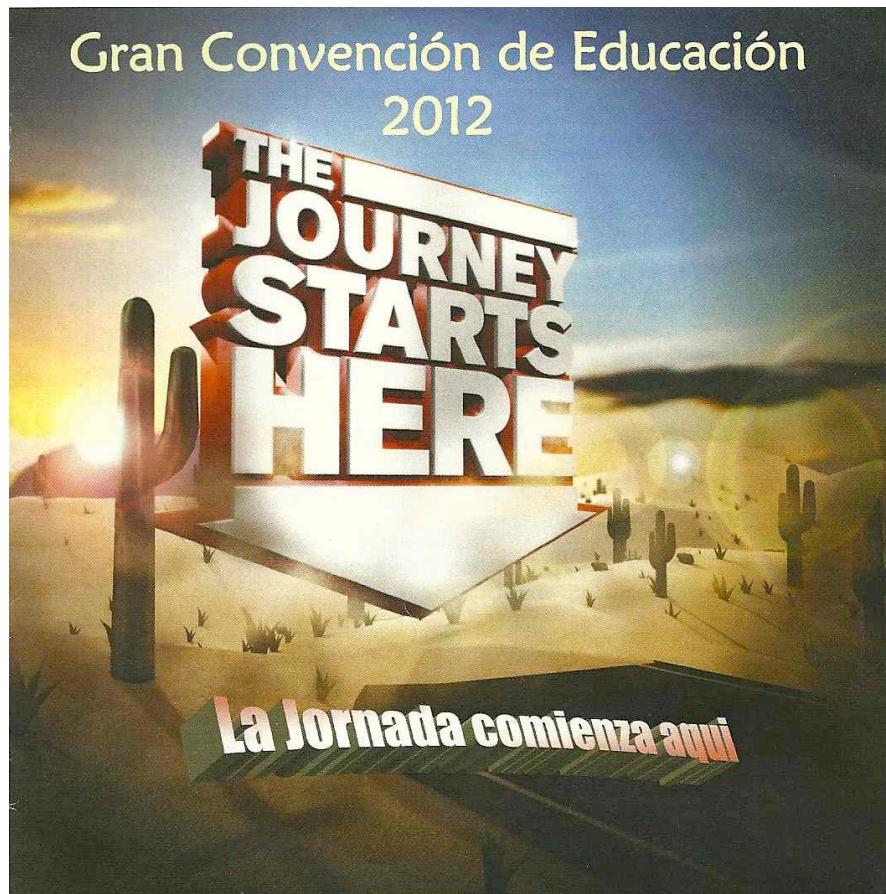
Si es posible, nos puede enviar las conferencias por email y nosotros hacemos las copias para las personas que se registren.

Usted tiene reservaciones en el Hotel Days Inn en Liberty, NY para los días viernes y sábado. Adjunto el mapa de cómo llegar a Mahanaim. Gracias por haber aceptado esta invitación para ministrar en este tan importante evento.

*En su servicio,
Rev. Virginia Maldonado*
Rev. Virginia Maldonado

APPENDIX 2

Educational Conference Flyer



“Bienaventurados los perfectos de camino; Los que andan en la ley de Jehová. Bienaventurados los que guardan sus testimonios, Y con todo el corazón le buscan: Pues no hacen iniquidad Los que andan en sus caminos. Tú encargaste Que sean muy guardados tus mandamientos.”

Salmos 119:1-4



APPENDIX 3

Brief Post Workshop Questionnaire



Leading Latino/a Young Adults to Life Vision Short Questionnaire

Has your level of awareness increased regarding the lack of Life Vision among Latino/a Young Adults (Circle one)?

- a) Yes
- b) No

If you are interested in resources that will assist leaders in helping Young Adults toward Life Vision please write your email address below.



Guiando Nuestros Jóvenes a una Visión de Vida Cuestionario

¿Ha crecido su conocimiento de la falta de Visión de Vida entre los Jóvenes Latinos (escoja uno)?

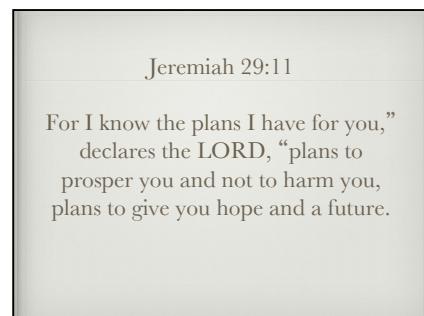
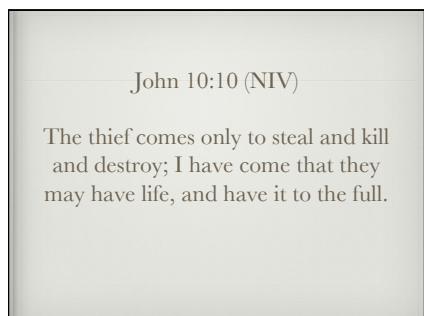
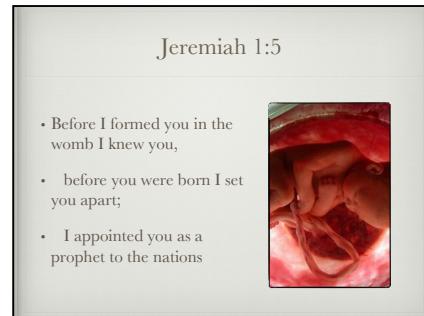
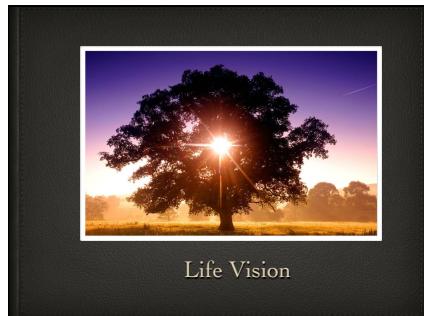
- a) Si
- b) No

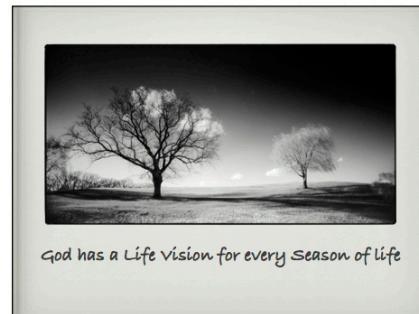
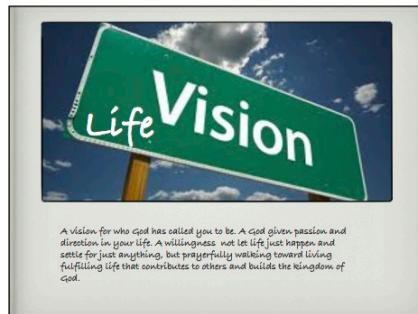
Si les interesa recursos para asistir a líderes en ayudar a Jóvenes en relación a Visión de Vida escriba su correo electrónico abajo.

APPENDIX 4

First Life Vision Series Sermon

2/2/13

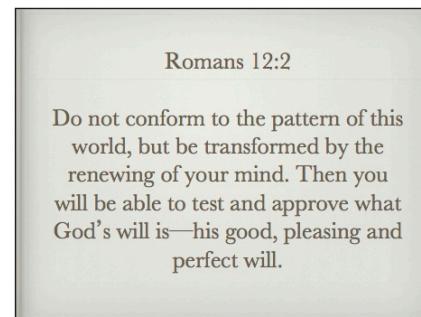
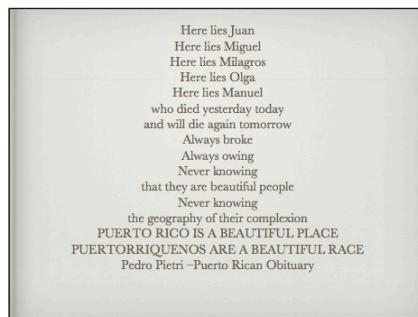




Genesis 12:1-4
"Now the LORD had said to Abram, Depart from your country, and from your kindred, and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you: (2) And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing; (3) And I will bless them that bless you, and curse him that curses you, and in you shall all families of the earth be blessed. (4) So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken to him, and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed from Haran."

John 10:10 (NLT)
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

2/2/13



Zoē

life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed, in the portion even in this world of those who put their trust in Christ, but after the resurrection to be consummated by new accessions (among them a more perfect body), and to last for ever.

-Strong's

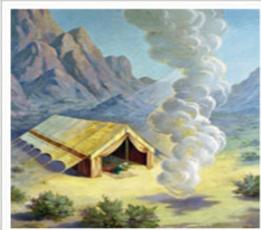
Seek Wisdom

"If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him."

-James 1:5



Create a Space



Exodus 33:7

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the "tent of meeting." Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp.

Vision Cast

Prov. 29:18

Where there is no vision, the people
are unrestrained, But happy is he
who keeps the law.

Vision Cast

Proverbs 29:18 (KJV)

Where there is no vision, the people
perish: but he that keepeth the law,
happy is he.



Be Courageous

Have I not commanded you? Be strong
and courageous. Do not be afraid; do
not be discouraged, for the LORD your
God will be with you wherever you go.”
-Joshua 1:9

Principle of the Path

- The principle
of the path is
direction not
intention
determines our
destination.



2/2/13

John 14:6-7(MSG)

Jesus said, "I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me.

Matthew 7:13-14

"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

APPENDIX 5

Life Vision Group Flyer

What is Life Vision?



As a follower of Christ, life vision takes on a rich and transformative possibility. It is a vision for who God has called you to be. It is a God given passion and direction for your life.

As a young adult you face major choices. Many of those choices will mark your life and set you on a definitive path. It's good to know that God has a course for you to take and a dream for you to experience. Jeremiah 29:11 tells us:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Join us as we learn how to discover God's vision for your life. **Life Vision for Young Adults** classes will be held on:

Sundays, November 25- December 30
1:20pm - 2:30pm
Master's Commission Lounge

For more information email: pastor@parkslopechristian.org



98 5th Avenue (Between Warren and Baltic St.)
Brooklyn, NY 11217
www.parkslopechristian.org

APPENDIX 6

Life Vision Study for ACTS

Life Vision



What is Life Vision?

A vision is a glimpse, a picture or an idea for something that is hidden or something that *can* be. As the name suggests, Life Vision is a **vision for the life that should be and can be yours**. As a follower of Christ, the meaning takes on a rich and transformative possibility.

1. It is a vision for who God has called you to be.
2. It is a God given passion and direction for your life.
3. When you have Life Vision there is a deep determination within you not to let life “just happen.”
4. You’re uneasy settling for just anything.
5. There are ebbs and flows but there is a consistent pull or push by the Holy Spirit toward living a fulfilling life that contributes to others and builds the kingdom of God.

No matter who you are, female or male, or what ethnicity you belong to, you are worth the price of His Son:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? -Romans 8:32

God has a vision for your life because you're just not a random occurrence you were redeemed with a price and made with purpose. “*Dios te ve*”, God sees you and because he sees you have a right to be seen.

Exercise A: I See You (10 Minutes). This exercise is meant to give each person a voice in the group, to be counted as someone that is important and whose input is welcomed. It will also affirm each person's value.

“UNTIL YOU SEE ME I DO NOT EXIST. WHEN YOU SEE ME, YOU BRING ME INTO EXISTENCE.”

Reflect a growing awareness of participants' relationship to one another in Christ by using an exercise that helps them shift focus away from self and toward others. Engage the exercise called, “I see you.” The point of this exercise is reflected in a Swahili proverb, Sawa bono Sikhona, which means “Until you see me I do not exist. When you see me, you bring me into existence.” In this exercise, stand up from your chair and walk toward another member of your group. Introduce yourself by name and by any other self-description you wish to use. Then say to that person, “... I see you, [name].”

At times you might feel that you are invisible and not worthy of being heard. You might also feel at times as if you are not as significant because you're still trying to figure out who you really are and who you are to become. Know that because God made you in His image your voice is important and deserves to be heard. You deserve to be acknowledged.

Exercise B: Hearing the Sound of the Genuine (10 Minutes)

Students break up into groups of 3-4 people and discuss when they heard what Howard Thurman describes as the “sound of the genuine” in their lives and who and or what helped them hear it.

*The Sound of the Genuine
by the Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman*

There is in every person something that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in herself [or himself] ... There is in you something that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. Nobody like you has ever been born and no one like you will ever be born again — you are the only one.

If you cannot hear the sound of the genuine within you, you will never find whatever it is for which you are searching and if you hear it and then do not follow it, it was better that you had never been born. You are the only you that has ever lived; your idiom is the only idiom of its kind in all the existences, and if you cannot hear the sound of the genuine in you, you will all of your life spend your days on the ends of strings that somebody else pulls.

So the burden of what I have to say to you is, “What is your name — who are you — and can you find a way to hear the sound of the genuine in yourself?” There are so many [voices and] noises going on inside of you, so many echoes of all sorts, so many internalizing of the rumble and the traffic going on in your minds, the confusions, the disorders by which your environment is peopled that I wonder if you can get still enough — not quiet enough — still enough to hear rumbling up from your unique and essential idiom the sound of the genuine in you. I do not know if you can. But this is your assignment.

The sound of the genuine is flowing through you. Do not be deceived and thrown off by all the noises that are a part even of your dreams [and] your ambitions that you do not hear the sound of the genuine in you. Because that is the only true guide you will ever have and if you do not have that you do not have a thing. Cultivate the discipline of listening to the sound of the genuine in yourself.

Presentation A: What is Life Vision?

As Christians we understand that the life that we receive in Christ grants us our present state of salvation and that his salvation will eventually extend into eternity (John 11:25). Life for a follower of Christ however, is not limited to being born or born again (John 3:5). The biblical witness is that God is interested in blessing all the aspects of your life. Consider the words of Jesus in John 11:10:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

This verse is found in the portion of scripture where Jesus describes himself as the “gate” that provides salvation (John 10:9) but also as the “Good Shepard” who blesses with abundant provision, as the sheep “come in and go out, they find pasture.” The “full life” harkens to Psalm 23:

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.”

There is a holistic provision for God’s followers. We will lack nothing in the physical, there are healthy “pastures”, but He also directs us and rejuvenates our soul.

In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind - John 1:4

In the first chapter of John begins the portrait of Jesus decisively different from the other gospels. While the other gospels begin with narrating the beginning of the earthly life of Jesus, the apostle John gives us glimpse of eternity past. He speaks of Jesus existing in eternity as God and as the author of all creation. Verse 4 further confirms he is God by declaring, “in him was life.” In other words, all life comes from Him. John is not only speaking of biological but of spiritual life. The Greek word for life here is *zōē*. Strong’s describes this *zōē* in the following way:

life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed, in the portion even in this world of those who put their trust in Christ, but after the resurrection to be consummated by new accessions (among them a more perfect body), and to last for ever.

This definition does a great job in capturing what Christ offers his followers, a life that is full in the present world and in the next. It culminates in a resurrected and eternal body. The creator is not only interested in our fellowship with Him at the end. There is portion of life for us on earth. It is not a figment of imagination or some type of “pipe dream”, it is real, and not a knock off or a “pirated copy”, but it’s as authentic as anything can be because it comes from the author of the universe. It’s not passive but a dynamic movement toward God. It comes with blessings in this world for those who put their trust in Christ.

Mission

Part of the gift of God's life is mission and purpose. In the letter to Ephesians Paul states:

For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. —Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

1. Long ago, God prepared good things for us to do.
2. We must ask God to give us a vision for the rich life and mission that He has prepared for us.

In this respect, vision is a glimpse or understanding into the reality that God has reserved for us to participate in. Andy Stanley says, "Vision is a clear mental picture of what could be, fueled by the conviction that it should be." Although a vision need not be highly detailed there is a level of conviction that provides clarity and direction at the right season of your life. For example you might have a strong conviction that God has gifted you to glorify him through music, then later He stirs something in you to be a classical violinist and then as time passes you receive a sense of peace that you are to play for the New York Philharmonic. God has uniquely created us, so this varies.

There are a number of biblical examples of those finding their calling later in life. A good example is Moses. It was at age 40 that Moses began getting a glimpse of what his calling might be when he sees the suffering of his people and reacting hastily, kills an Egyptian Guard. At age 80, God calls Moses back to Egypt to free his people. However, you do not have to wait till you are 40 or 80 to know or act upon your calling! Do not miss the Life Vision God has for you in this important season of your life.

Samuel was around 12 years old when while ministering in God's temple, he hears God's voice. Even before he was born, his mother Hannah, who had been childless before God gave her Samuel, dedicated him to God. Some of you might have been dedicated to God at an early age. Some of you might have received real prophecies from God from people the Lord uses. Remember them because God was already calling you into your destiny.

David was probably 25 years old or younger when he was anointed as King of Israel.

Exercise A: Read 1 Samuel 16:4-13 and answer these questions in groups of 3.

3. Was David considered the first choice when Samuel was searching for a king?

4. David was tending sheep. This was probably the lowest chore among the family. What do we learn about how God calls people sometimes and how can you apply it to your life or where you come from?

There is a principle that is constant when considering the lives of people in the Bible as well as our lives when it comes to Life Vision. As we grow in the different dimensions of our lives (spiritual, physical, mental, and social) our Life Vision becomes clearer. The spiritual dimension should be the guiding dimension as it connects to our creator and the architect of our lives.

List what you see as your gifts (what you're good at), roles or what you feel you have been called to do. If you do not know yet it is ok.

<u>Gifts</u>	<u>Role</u>
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Exercise C: God's plan for you (5 minutes).

Normally when we try to discover what we were designed for we begin by listing things that we gifted or experienced in. This can certainly help in the process. God uses our experiences and talents to mold and prepare us. What we might miss is allowing the Holy Spirit to confirm a course in our hearts. Students write their names and break up in twos and take turns reading the verses to one another with

their names included. For the second verse and last fill in write in what you feel God has called you to be calling or career.

“For _____ [is] God’s masterpiece. He has created _____ anew in Christ Jesus, so _____ can do the good things he planned for _____ long ago.” - Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

“I knew you _____ before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born _____ I set you apart and appointed you as _____ [and] my prophet to the nations.” -Jeremiah 1:4-5 (NLT)

Let the verses sync into your heart as you hear them. Spend a few moments and prayer and then share what God placed on your heart with your partner.

Instructor: allow general sharing time.

We learn from these verses that God has already planned good works for us to do before we were born. Before our birth He already had gifts set aside for us. In the case of the Jeremiah he had already selected him to be a prophet to all the nations.

Pastor Rick Warren says, " You were made by God and for God— and until you understand that, life will never make sense." To a great extent until we understand who God would have us be we are unclear about our lives and feel that something is might be missing and like our salvation it is found in Jesus.

Homework: Do the Spiritual Gifts analysis tool found in
<http://www.churchgrowth.org/cgi-cg/gifts.cgi?intro=1>

Print out your results to share in class next week.

These steps can help you start hearing and following God's calling for your life.

1. Worship God

There is no calling without a Caller. Take dedicated time to worship, glorify, praise and thank Him. Then as you live and work every day from waking until sleeping, do everything to honor Him.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship ... in the splendor of his holiness.

Psalm 29:2

2. Read and Study the Bible

The Bible is God's authority and our manual for living. Consider it as bread, and feed from it every day. If you have never read the Bible, consider starting with the book of John, Ephesians or Psalms.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.
Psalm 119:105

3. Pray

Be in conversation with God every day, perhaps multiple times during every day. He is always available. Pray for guidance. Read a Psalm as your own personal prayer.

Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul - Psalm 143:8

4. Listen to God

Prayer is two-way communication. In a journal, notebook or this Course book, write thoughts that come to your mind for later reflection and Bible study.

Be still, and know that I am God
Psalm 46:10

5. Be with Christians

Spend time with Christians whom you like and who like you. Study the Bible together. Pray together. Encourage one another. Follow the ABCs of Accountability, Belonging and Care.

... consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds
Hebrews 10:24

6. Seek Wise Counsel

Seek wisdom first from above (James 3:17) and then from other people. Some may be friends. Some may be people God sends our way with whom we talk only once.

Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.
-Proverbs 1:5

7. Consider Unfolding Circumstances

Be a good steward of the opportunities God gives you. Consider each situation with God in prayer. Always measure your prayer, counsel and unfolding circumstances in light of the truth of the Bible.

Be very careful, then, how you live ... making the most of every opportunity ...
-Ephesians 5:15-16

8. Confess and Clear Your Head .

A clear head is critical in thinking through options and seeking God's leading. At every stage of our life it is important that we are right with God. It is easy to become confused, especially if sin is getting in the way. Confess it, and clear it out every day.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us ... -1 John 1:9

9. Be Alert for God's Peace

As you consider various options and paths, be alert for the peace that transcends all understanding, even in the midst of the most chaotic of times. Also as you consider certain paths in your life. Always ask if you feel a peace about the decision you are going to make.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your

hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:7

10. Keep a Journal

Keep track of what you learn from your Bible reading, thoughts you have during prayer, advice you receive from your friends, unfolding circumstances, and things that bring you God's peace.

11. Trust and Obey

There is no other way! If you think the Lord wants you to do something, and it seems to be in alignment with everything we have been talking about, then do it! If you hear Him, follow Him.

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." - John 14:2

Learn to Dream

Dreams

*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.*

Langston Hughes

The dreams and desires that we have in our lives are one of the greatest assets we have as we seek to gain our Life Vision. Desires that God embeds on our hearts act as northern stars to our purpose.

Exercise C – Your Dreams

List some dreams that you had as a child/teenager/young adult:

Which dream do you still have? Which have you let go?

Can your dreams mature?

Instructor has students break up in groups of 4-5 people and share.

Everyone's Life Vision is connected to what Westminster Catechism states is the chief end of a human being, "to glorify God and enjoy him forever." Within the scope of glorifying our creator there is God's dream specifically for you. When you catch a glimpse

of his dream for you, your seeing your Life Vision. There is a mixture of ingredients that God uses to bring us into unique purpose. These are:

1. Desire

Our redeemed hearts speak to us when there is a need that must be met or a work that you feel must be accomplished. Many times people do not understand your passion, but you understand the sense of accomplishment and joy you feel when you are engaged in helping other or a service.

2. Gifts

God gifts us with the tools to accomplish the mission that he has placed on our hearts. Under God's guidance mature those gifts that he has given you. Take time to train and study. In 2 Timothy 1:6 Paul tells Timothy to "fan the flame" that was in him through the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands was the corporate confirmation that a ministry had been given to you.

3. Experiences

God uses experiences to make us sensitive to the needs of others. He uses experience to expose us to realities that we could never conceive of. Within the realm of experience there are opportunities that are presented to us. Opportunities will give us an understanding of what a career or ministry might entail. This is where apprenticing and interning are valuable to us. Opportunities to serve where there is a need in a church, community or short term missions trips will develop our servant's heart and can make our Life Vision clearer.

4. People

The Lord will place people in our lives that will call the "genuine" from us. These people who encourage and spur us on to good works, especially those that involve pursue our life's passion. They can be people who you have relationships with or those that God might use at any given moment in our lives to remind us of who we are and who we were meant to be. Among the people who God uses are:

a) Mentors

b) Role Models

c) Friends and Family who know your heart and support you.

Exercise C: Walking into the Future

Materials needed: enough green and orange post it notes for all the students to write on (around 10 each). Students should also have a journal with them for reflection.

Instructor: This exercise is meant to allow students to see the future God intends. Ask the Holy Spirit to give a glimpse, to each student, of the future he intends for them and what they must leave in the present to get there. Make sure that each student has enough space around him or her. Ask them to stand up and when its time and do the movements with their eyes closed. Guide the students in the exercise by reading what's below:

- *Find a comfortable place and position. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Release. Free your mind of your worry, concern, questions, or excitement. Open your mind, heart and will. Now journey down from your head into your heart. Try to become in tune with your feelings and surroundings.*
- *Imagine standing at a doorway of a possible future where you fulfill God's purpose and passion for you.*

First 5 minutes:

- *Take one step forward. What do you see past that doorway into the future?*
- *Step through the threshold of the doorway into the future.*
- *Look all around you - What do you see? What's different? Who is there? What are people doing? How are people relating to each other between generations? What is the mood of the community? How are you feeling? What are the sounds? How are you and others caring for vocation in young people and adults who work with them?*

Next 5 minutes:

- *From that future place, look back through the doorway to the past and find yourself. What advice do you give to your past self to move toward the future you see?*
- *Walk back through the doorway and return again to the present. Write what you saw, felt and heard. Be as specific as you can about the images, feelings and*

activities that took place in your vision.

Using your journal notes, construct a set of post-it notes (green) that reflect, in a single word or phrase, *what you saw when you walked into the future* and another set of post-its (orange) acknowledging by word or phrase *the things you let go of* as you moved across the threshold (the doorway) into the future.

Instructor: Ask the class to post their notes on a window and then to sit down. If no window is available you can use a board of some type. Then have the class take time to read the wall of notes silently.

Allow for general sharing when students return back to their seats.

Instructor: Encourage students to go to <http://visionforvida.org/life-vision-strategy/> and use the strategies found at the site including conducting a Life Vision small group in their church.

Final Prayer – Students prayer for one another. Instructor ends in a general prayer.

APPENDIX 7

Life Vision Study Instructor



Vision for Vida

Life Vision Course

Instructor Version

By Luis Alvarez

Revised 1/9/2013

About the Study



"Vida" is the Spanish word for life, but have you noticed a growing trend among many Latin@ young adults? They feel stuck. They do not have any idea of what the future might hold for them. Many of the youth we serve have made a real commitment to Christ and regularly attend church and our youth groups, but somehow their faith is not empowering them to see the endless possibilities and the potential that God has placed in them. It would seem that they have no "vida." They have no desires or aspiration toward a calling and career. More importantly, they lack a passion, dreams or goals for their life. They are in need of vision for their lives. Throughout my 20 years of serving youth, lacking vision has been a constant theme among young adults and this troubles me. I have resolved to do something about it. Young adult, you have an incredible future ahead of you if seek and walk in the vision for life God has given you!

This course is geared towards emerging young adults (18 & 19) and twenty somethings. It was designed for a small group setting, as this will allow you to participate and feel comfortable sharing. It also allows for more intimacy. Bring a notebook for journaling and taking notes to every class. These classes are meant to help you start to think about the future that God intends for you. The questions and exercises will allow you to describe what you are feeling as well as what you're thinking. The goal of this course is not necessarily for you to know exactly what you're going to do in life. However, this course could spark a flame that will later be fanned or it will confirm something that you already know and it will spur you on to pursue those aspirations. I pray that it will be an experience that the Holy Spirit will use to remind you to live a full and purposeful life, the life that Jesus promised his disciples in John 10:10. You should be praying at the beginning and end of every class. Ask the Spirit to speak to you in every class. Pray that he might lead you to your Life Vision.

I look forward to hearing your feedback. Please email me at luis@visionforvida.org .

Bendiciones,

Pastor Luis Alvarez,
Park Slope Christian Tabernacle, Brooklyn, New York

Session 1

What is Life Vision?

Instructors: Make sure you find a place to hold the course free from distractions. The room should be an informal space. It is recommended that you have the group in a circle facing one another. You should be part of the circle. Create a place conducive to presence of the Holy Spirit. Pray and anticipate the activity of the Spirit in the class. Make sure that every one in the group “checks in” by stating why they are in the group then pray before you begin the class.

A vision is a glimpse, a picture or an idea for something that is hidden or something that *can* be. As the name suggests, Life Vision is a **vision for the life that should be and can be yours**. As a follower of Christ, the meaning takes on a rich and transformative possibility.

6. It is a vision for who God has called you to be.
7. It is a God given passion and direction for your life.
8. When you have Life Vision there is a deep determination within you not to let life “just happen.”
9. You’re uneasy settling for just anything.
10. There are ebbs and flows but there is a consistent pull or push by the Holy Spirit toward living a fulfilling life that contributes to others and builds the kingdom of God.

No matter who you are, female or male, Argentinian, Bolivian, Chilean, Cuban Colombian, Costa Rican, Dominican, Ecuadorian, Guatemalan, Honduran, Nicaraguan, Panamanian, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Puerto Rican, Mexican, Salvadorian, Uruguayan or Venezuelan you are of incredible worth to God. You are worth the price of His Son:

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? -Romans 8:32

God has a vision for your life because you're just not a random occurrence you were redeemed with a price and made with purpose. “*Dios te ve*”, God sees you and because he sees you have a right to be seen.

Exercise A: I See You (10 Minutes). This exercise is meant to give each person a voice in the group, to be counted as someone that is important and whose input is welcomed. It will also affirm each person's value.

“UNTIL YOU SEE ME I DO NOT EXIST. WHEN YOU SEE ME, YOU BRING ME INTO EXISTENCE.”

Reflect a growing awareness of participants' relationship to one another in Christ by using an exercise that helps them shift focus away from self and toward others. Engage the exercise called, “I see you.” The point of this exercise is reflected in a Swahili proverb, Sawa bono Sikhona, which means “Until you see me I do not exist. When you see me, you bring me into existence.” In this exercise, stand up from your chair and walk toward another member of your group. Introduce yourself by name and by any other self-description you wish to use. Then say to that person, “... I see you, [name]¹¹¹.”

At times you might feel that you are invisible and not worthy of being heard. You might also feel at times as if you are not as significant because you're still trying to figure out who you really are and who you are to become. Know that because God made you in His image your voice is important and deserves to be heard. You deserve to be acknowledged.

¹¹¹ Stephen Lewis et al., *The FTE Guide to Vocation Care* (Decatur: The Fund for Theological Education, 2012), 10, <http://www.fteleaders.org/pages/fte-guide-to-vocationcare> (accessed September 4, 2012).

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So the burden of what I have to say to you is, “What is your name — who are you — and can you find a way to hear the sound of the genuine in yourself?” There are so many [voices and] noises going on inside of you, so many echoes of all sorts, so many internalizing of the rumble and the traffic going on in your minds, the confusions, the disorders by which your environment is peopled that I wonder if you can get still enough — not quiet enough — still enough to hear rumbling up from your unique and essential idiom the sound of the genuine in you. I do not know if you can. But this is your assignment.

The sound of the genuine is flowing through you. Do not be deceived and thrown off by all the noises that are a part even of your dreams [and] your ambitions that you do not hear the sound of the genuine in you. Because that is the only true guide you will ever have and if you do not have that you do not have a thing. Cultivate the discipline of listening to the sound of the genuine in yourself.

Exercise B: Hearing the Sound of the Genuine (10 Minutes)

Students break up into groups of 3-4 people and discuss a time when they heard what Howard Thurman describes as the “sound of the genuine” in their lives and who or what experience helped them hear it.

¹¹² Ibid, 14.

As Christians we understand that the life that we receive in Christ grants us our present state of salvation and that his salvation will eventually extend into eternity (John 11:25). Life for a follower of Christ however, is not limited to being born or born again (John 3:5). The biblical witness is that God is interested in blessing all the aspects of your life. Consider the words of Jesus in John 11:10:

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“The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.”

There is a holistic provision for God’s followers. We will lack nothing in the physical, there are healthy “pastures”, but He also directs us and rejuvenates our soul.

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life real and genuine, a life active and vigorous, devoted to God, blessed, in the portion even in this world of those who put their trust in Christ, but after the resurrection to be consummated by new accessions

(among them a more perfect body), and to last for ever¹¹³.

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¹¹³ Goodrick, Edward W., and John R. Kohlberger III. *The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.

Session 2

My Ministry and My Mission

Instructor: Make sure that every one in the group “checks in” by sharing something meaningful that happened in their life last week. After each one shares, have everyone in the group say “I see you” or “te veo” then pray before you begin the class.

Part of the gift of God’s life is mission and purpose. In the letter to Ephesians Paul states:

For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. —Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

5. Long ago, God prepared good things for us to do.
6. We must ask God to give us a vision for the rich life and mission that He has prepared for us.

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¹¹⁴ Stanley, Andy. *Visioneering: God's Blueprint for Developing and Maintaining Personal Vision*. Nashville, TN: Multnomah Books. Kindle Edition Locations 278-279.

¹¹⁵ Acts 7:22-29.

¹¹⁶ Exodus 7:7.

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Exercise A: Read 1 Samuel 16:4-13 and answer these questions in groups of 3.

1. Was David considered the first choice when Samuel was searching for a king?
2. David was tending sheep. This was probably the lowest chore among the family. What do we learn about how God calls people sometimes and how can you apply it to your life or where you come from?

There is a principle that is constant when considering the lives of people in the Bible as well as our lives when it comes to Life Vision. As we grow in the different dimensions of our lives (spiritual, physical, mental, and social) our Life Vision becomes clearer. The spiritual dimension should be the guiding dimension as it connects to our creator and the architect of our lives.

Homework: Do the Spiritual Gifts analysis tool found in

<http://www.churchgrowth.org/cgi-cg/gifts.cgi?intro=1>

Print out your results to share in class next week.

Instructor: Please stress the importance of doing the analysis and bringing it next week.

Also do the Spiritual Gifts analysis tool.

Session 3

Gifts, Abilities and Dreams: Part 1

Instructor: Make sure that every one in the group “checks in” by sharing something meaningful that happened in their life last week. After each one shares, have everyone in the group say “I see you” or “te veo” then pray before you begin the class.

Paul tells us in Romans tells us that:

God in his kindness gave each of us different gifts...-Romans 12:6

In this session you will explore the gifts and abilities that God has given you. These usually point to God’s purpose for you and what you were uniquely made for. Spiritual analysis tools help us understand how we might be gifted. They are great for understanding how we might serve in the kingdom of God, but do not separate the sacred and the secular in your life. This tool points out how we are created and at times it could give a glimpse on what kind of job you can also do in the secular world. For example if you score high in “showing mercy” you might consider a job in social work or human resources. A teaching spiritual gift can lend itself to a career in education or in training. Administration gifts can be used in business. The reality is that both natural and spiritual gifts have their origin in God.

Instructors: Share your Spiritual Gifts Analysis first.

Exercise A. Sharing of Spiritual Gifts Analysis. Go around the room and give students an opportunity to share their results.

List what you see as your gifts (natural or spiritual) and special abilities. Also list some roles you’ve excelled in.

Gifts or Abilities

Roles

1. What do you feel you have been called to do at this point of your life?

Session 4

Gifts, Abilities and Dreams: Part 2

Instructor: Make sure that every one in the group “checks in” by sharing something meaningful that happened in their life last week. After each one shares, have everyone in the group say “I see you” or “te veo” then pray before you begin the class.

Exercise C: God’s plan for you (5 minutes).

Last week we listed gifts, roles and abilities. Observing our lives and analyzing these can certainly help in the process of discovering what we are made for. What we might miss in our analysis is allowing the Holy Spirit to confirm a course in our hearts.

Write your names in the spaces provided below and break up in twos and take turns reading the verses to one another with their names included. For the second verse and last fill-in write in what you feel God has called you to be calling or career.

“For _____ [is] God’s masterpiece. He has created _____ anew in Christ Jesus, so _____ can do the good things he planned for _____ long ago.” - Ephesians 2:10 (NLT)

“I knew you _____ before I formed you in your mother’s womb. Before you were born _____ I set you apart and appointed you as _____ [and] my prophet to the nations.” -Jeremiah 1:4-5 (NLT)

Let the verses sync into your heart as you hear them. Spend a few moments in prayer and then share what God placed on your heart with your partner.

Instructor: allow the students to share what they wrote (its ok if they write more than one thing for what they were appointed to do or if they did not write anything. Encourage them to continue to pray for this.

We learn from these verses that God has already planned good works for us to do before we were born. Before our birth He already had gifts set aside for us to use to accomplish those good works. In the case of the Jeremiah he had already selected him to be a prophet to all the nations.

Pastor Rick Warren says, " You were made by God and for God— and until you understand that, life will never make sense¹¹⁷." To a great extent until we understand who God would have us be we are unclear about our lives and feel that something might be missing and like our salvation it is found in Jesus. We should find our life and our drive in God. In the book of Acts, while Paul is in Athens, he quotes a truth from the Cretan philosopher Epimenides:

"For in him we live and move and have our being." – Acts 14:28

These steps can help you start hearing and following God's calling for your life¹¹⁸.

1. Worship God

There is no calling without a Caller. Take dedicated time to worship, glorify, praise and thank Him. Then as you live and work every day from waking until sleeping, do everything to honor Him.

Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship ... in the splendor of his holiness.

Psalm 29:2

2. Read and Study the Bible

The Bible is God's authority and our manual for living. Consider it as bread, and feed from it every day. If you have never read the Bible, consider starting with the book of John, Ephesians or Psalms.

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

Psalm 119:105

3. Pray

Be in conversation with God every day, perhaps multiple times during every day. He is always available. Pray for guidance. Read a Psalm as your own personal prayer.

Show me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul - Psalm 143:8

¹¹⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 18.

¹¹⁸ Based on Crossroads Career Services, *Maximize your Career – 6 Steps to Find Jobs, Careers, Calling.* Crossroad Career Services, Inc.. 2012, 8-9.

4. Listen to God

Prayer is two-way communication. In a journal, notebook or this Coursebook, write thoughts that come to your mind for later reflection and Bible study.

Be still, and know that I am God
Psalm 46:10

5. Be with Christians

Spend time with Christians whom you like and who like you. Study the Bible together. Pray together. Encourage one another. Follow the ABCs of Accountability, Belonging and Care.

... consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds
Hebrews 10:24

6. Seek Wise Counsel

Seek wisdom first from above (James 3:17) and then from other people. Some may be friends. Some may be people God sends our way with whom we talk only once.

Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance.
-Proverbs 1:5

7. Consider Unfolding Circumstances

Be a good steward of the opportunities God gives you. Consider each situation with God in prayer. Always measure your prayer, counsel and unfolding circumstances in light of the truth of the Bible.

Be very careful, then, how you live ... making the most of every opportunity ...
-Ephesians 5:15-16

8. Confess and Clear Your Head .

A clear head is critical in thinking through options and seeking God's leading. At every stage of our life it is important that we are right with God. It is easy to become confused, especially if sin is getting in the way. Confess it, and

clear it out every day.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us ... -1 John 1:9

9. Be Alert for God's Peace

As you consider various options and paths, be alert for the peace that transcends all understanding, even in the midst of the most chaotic of times.

Also as you consider certain paths in your life. Always ask if you feel a peace about the decision you are going to make.

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. - Philippians 4:7

10. Keep a Journal

Keep track of what you learn from your Bible reading, thoughts you have during prayer, advice you receive from your friends, unfolding circumstances, and things that bring you God's peace.

11. Trust and Obey

There is no other way! If you think the Lord wants you to do something, and it seems to be in alignment with everything we have been talking about, then do it! If you hear Him, follow Him.

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." - John 14:2

Learn to Dream

*Dreams*¹¹⁹

*Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.
Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.*

Langston Hughes

The dreams and desires that we have in our lives are one of the greatest assets we have as we seek to gain our Life Vision. Desires that God embeds on our hearts act as northern stars to our purpose.

Exercise C – Your Dreams

List some dreams that you had as a child/teenager/young adult:

Which dream do you still have? Which have you let go?

Can your dreams mature?

Instructor: have students break up in groups of 4-5 people and share.

¹¹⁹ edited with an introduction by Arnold Rampersad, *The Collected Works of Langston Hughes*, ed. Christopher C. De Santis (Columbia: University of Missouri, 2002), 409.

Everyone's Life Vision is connected to what Westminster Catechism states is the chief end of a human being, "to glorify God and enjoy him forever¹²⁰." Within the scope of glorifying our creator there is God's dream specifically for you. When you catch a glimpse of his dream for you, your seeing your Life Vision. There is a mixture of ingredients that God uses to bring us into unique purpose. These are:

1. Desire

Our redeemed hearts speak to us when there is a need that must be met or a work that you feel must be accomplished. Many times people do not understand your passion, but you understand the sense of accomplishment and joy you feel when you are engaged in helping other or a service.

2. Gifts

God gifts us with the tools to accomplish the mission that he has placed on our hearts. Under God's guidance mature those gifts that he has given you. Take time to train and study. In 2 Timothy 1:6 Paul tells Timothy to "fan the flame" that was in him through the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands was the corporate confirmation that a ministry had been given to you.

3. Experiences

God uses experiences to make us sensitive to the needs of others. He uses experience to expose us to realities that we could never conceive of. Within the realm of experience there are opportunities that are presented to us. Opportunities will give us an understanding of what a career or ministry might entail. This is where apprenticing and interning are valuable to us. Opportunities to serve where there is a need in a church, community or short term missions trips will develop our servant's heart and can make our Life Vision clearer.

4. People

The Lord will place people in our lives that will call the "genuine" from us. These people who encourage and spur us

¹²⁰ G.I. Williamson, *The Westminster Shorter Catechism: for Study Classes*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed Pub Co, 2003), page 1.

on to good works, especially those that involve pursue our life's passion. They can be people who you have relationships with or those that God might use at any given moment in our lives to remind us of who we are and who we were meant to be. Among the people who God uses are:

a) Mentors

b) Role Models

c) Friends and Family who know your heart and support you.

Session 5

Who are you?

Instructor: Make sure that every one in the group “checks in” by sharing something meaningful that happened in their life last week. After each one shares, have everyone in the group say “I see you” or “te veo” then pray before you begin the class.

*Here lies Juan
Here lies Miguel
Here lies Milagros
Here lies Olga
Here lies Manuel
who died yesterday today
and will die again tomorrow
Always broke
Always owing
Never knowing
that they are beautiful people
Never knowing
the geography of their complexion
PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE
PUERTORRIQUEÑOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE¹²¹
Pedro Pietri – Puerto Rican Obituary*

Exercise A: We are a beautiful Race.

Instructor: Poll the class for the different Latin@ origins in the group. The group repeats the last two lines of the poem by replacing the last two lines with country and people represented in the class. As a side note we understand that technically Puerto Ricans or *Latin@s in general are not a race. However, the poet uses his creative license to define race as a group of people.*

What are the things you love about your ethnic heritage?

121 Pietri, Pedro. *Puerto Rican Obituary*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974.

*I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well*
– Psalm 139:14

The psalmist understood that he was special because God made him. This meant that everything he was, was created by God. This included being male and included being Jewish. In the same way you can thank God for making you who you are, if it's female or male, tall or short, if your hair is curly or straight, if your skin color is mocha colored or white, if you have almond shaped or round eyes - you are part of God's beautiful design.



In order to believe that God has dreams for us we must believe in the high worth that God has placed on us. We are constantly being bombarded by messages many times that do not affirm who we are, but instead they demean us. The majority of us are not gang bangers, slum dwellers, or drug addicts. Latin@s are hard working people who have come or are descendants of those who came to this country to better our life. We have contributed greatly to this country and will continue to do so.



It's important that we learn to discern the messages that we are presented with. In the United States people of color are stereotyped and are many times victims of bigotry and cruelty. Latin@s are characterized as being people who commit crimes and are dependent on the welfare system¹²². Hispanic immigrants who come here for a better way of life and the opportunity to work hard and provide for their families, are seen as those who take jobs away from other Americans when doing the most menial jobs. Their children although born and bread in the United States still receive the stigma of being immigrants.

Orlando Crespo in his book “Being Latino in Christ” tells the story of being treated different when schoolmates discovered he was Latin@ he says:

... because of my light complexion some of my new friends in junior high school did not notice that I was Puerto Rican. I enjoyed letting them assume I was White, because they treated me as one of their own. The moment they discovered I was Puerto Rican, the look on their faces and their attitudes changed. "You're Puerto Rican? I cannot believe it. I thought you were White." In other words, I thought you were OK. Now I do not know anymore. They were not mean to me, but something felt different. They seemed more aloof and less interested in me. They did not seek me out the way they used to. As a young teenager very attuned to my emotions, I could feel the difference and I hated it. But instead of brushing this off and seeing their ignorance, I internalized my feelings and saw myself as "less than."¹²³

Questions:

1. Have you or a family member ever been the victim of bigotry, racism or prejudice?
2. How did you feel when this happen to you or your family?

¹²² Marcelo M. Suárez-Orozco and Mariela M. Páez, *Latinos: Remaking America*. eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 23.

¹²³ Orlando Crespo, *Being Latino in Christ: Kindle Edition*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), Kindle Locations 102-109.

The truth is that prejudice is a sin before God¹²⁴. This sin intends to rob the humanity and the image of God that each of us was created with, but we do have to allow it. It's important that we recognize when we have accepted messages that come from this sin. Sometimes it shows itself when we feel uncomfortable going to places that are outside of the "Barrio" to places where "white people" go. Maybe you feel nervous in stores, malls or restaurants that are not in the "hood." You could be the only person of color in an all "white" team and although you are an excellent member of the team, for some reason, you feel like your contribution is not as important as the others.

Some of these beliefs could have been based on real occasions of discrimination against you or someone you knew. It also could have been an incorrect belief that you accepted because it was taught to you directly or indirectly. You might have affirmed this belief about yourself throughout your life. Dr. Elizabeth Rios in her book "Do not buy the Lie" says:

Most of our belief systems work for us in a positive way and help us navigate through life. However, when a belief is formed early and with strong emotions, it can remain unchanged in the subconscious until such time as it's consciously changed. ... Satan knows our weaknesses that are linked to our BS [Belief Systems] and he attacks our minds in those areas. He attacks us with his lies¹²⁵.

It is vital that be recognized negative belief systems about ourselves and about being Latin@ in the United States.

3. What are some negative belief systems that you have about yourself and why do you believe them?

4. What are some negative belief systems you have of your ethnic background and why do you believe them?

Exercise B: Spend a few minutes praying and writing some belief systems they might have. Ask God to help you see them.

¹²⁴ James 2:4

¹²⁵ Elizabeth D. Rios, *Don't Buy the Lie*. Rios (Ghetto Rose Publications, 2012), Kindle Locations 566-570.

Instructor: Have the students break up in groups of three and share the ones you are comfortable sharing. Please be aware that this exercise might bring up some difficult feelings for the student. Some of these belief systems are strongholds. Be prayerful.

We must learn to reject those thoughts that are not based on God's truth. We need to recognize what Joyce Meyer correctly points out that our mind is a battlefield.¹²⁶ We have to continually "renew our minds" through the word and "take every thought captive."

Taking thoughts captive is the process of evaluating the thoughts that come into our minds, not just accepting and identifying ourselves with them. If we do so, we are being passive and soon a passive mind will be filled with all types of lies. We keep them in a kind of holding cell. As we hold the thought we determine if the thought is from God or of the Enemy. The ones that are from the Enemy we reject and counter with the truth of God's word. The ones are truth we receive.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:4-5; Proverbs 23:7 Why are our thoughts important?

Read Romans 5:5 How do our actions relate to our thoughts?

Read Romans 12:2 How will our lives be changed if we renew our minds according to God's Word?

Review 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 How will we know the difference between what is in our mind and what is in the mind of God?

¹²⁶ Joyce Meyer, *Battlefield of the Mind: Winning the Battle in Your Mind*, Updated FaithWords ed. (New York: FaithWords, 2011), 15.

Session 6

Walking Through the Door

Instructor: Make sure that every one in the group “checks in” by sharing something meaningful that happened in their life last week. After each one shares, have everyone in the group say “I see you” or “te veo” then pray before you begin the class.

1. What have learned about who you are and what God has called you to do?

Consider the principle of the path:

Direction – not intention- determines our destination¹²⁷

For example, you might have the best intentions to go back to college, but you say you do not have enough money or time to go full time, so you never start. Although God knows you really want to go back to school, accepting this roadblock will never get you where you want to go. You will be off the path. Use what you have to get on the path and consider what you can do to get closer to your goal. For example, consider taking one class. Whatever it is, put yourself on the path. Then take another step towards that same path as God provides and then another and eventually your perseverance will pay off.

If you want to be a business owner, become an intern in a company to learn the ropes. You might have to start at the bottom but God many times puts us in places of grace as we work like he was our boss.

And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

- Colossians 3:23-24 (NKJV)

2. What are some next steps to get you on the right path?

¹²⁷ Andy Stanley, *The Principle of the Path: How to Get from Where You Are to Where You Want to Be* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 14.

Be accountable to someone (Mentor, Pastor, leader) about living out your Life vision. Find someone who will spur you on to good works.

Exercise C: Walking into the Future

Materials needed: enough green and orange post it notes for all the students to write on (around 10 each). Students should also have a journal with them for reflection.

Instructor: This exercise is meant to allow students to see the future God intends. Ask the Holy Spirit to give a glimpse, to each student, of the future he intends for them and what they must leave in the present to get there. Make sure that each student has enough space around him or her. Ask them to stand up and when its time and do the movements with their eyes closed. Guide the students in the exercise by reading what's below:

- *Find a comfortable place and position. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths. Release. Free your mind of your worry, concern, questions, or excitement. Open your mind, heart and will. Now journey down from your head into your heart. Try to become in tune with your feelings and surroundings.*
- *Imagine standing at a doorway of a possible future where you fulfill God's purpose and passion for you.*

First 5 minutes:

- *Take one step forward. What do you see past that doorway into the future?*
- *Step through the threshold of the doorway into the future.*
- *Look all around you - What do you see? What's different? Who is there? What are people doing? How are people relating to each other between generations? What is the mood of the community? How are you feeling? What are the sounds? How are you and others caring for vocation in young people and adults*

who work with them?

Next 5 minutes:

- *From that future place, look back through the doorway to the past and find yourself. What advice do you give to your past self to move toward the future you see?*
- *Walk back through the doorway and return again to the present. Write what you saw, felt and heard. Be as specific as you can about the images, feelings and activities that took place in your vision.*

Using your journal notes, construct a set of post-it notes (green) that reflect, in a single word or phrase, *what you saw when you walked into the future* and another set of post-its (orange) acknowledging by word or phrase *the things you let go of* as you moved across the threshold (the doorway) into the future.

Instructor: Ask the class to post their notes on a window and then to sit down. If no window is available you can use a board of some type. Then have the class take time to read the wall of notes silently.

Allow for general sharing when students return back to their seats.

Final Prayer – Students prayer for one another. Ask the students to take the Life Vision pledge.

Life Vision Pledge

As God's wonderful creation, I recognize that God loves me deeply and has given me gifts and abilities. I am a co-laborer with God.

I pledge to seek the abundant life that God has for me. I will honor God with all that I am, using my gifts and my abilities in ministry to church and in mission to the world. I pledge to honor God by pursuing my Life Vision.

Instructor ends in a general prayer.

Graduation Fiesta: Instructor please celebrate the completion of the course with the students by having a Graduation fiesta. This can be done on a 7th group meeting. You and the students should bring in food from the different Latin@ groups. If you are in a church setting arrange for the Students should be recognized publically the following Sunday service.

Life Vision Graduation Ceremony

Materials Need: A certificate of completion for each student

Have the Students seated in the front row of the sanctuary.

The instructor explains to the congregation the importance of the Life Vision study undertaken by the students.

The instructor calls the name of each student and has the student stand and come up to receive a certificate of completion. Afterward they line up and face the congregation.

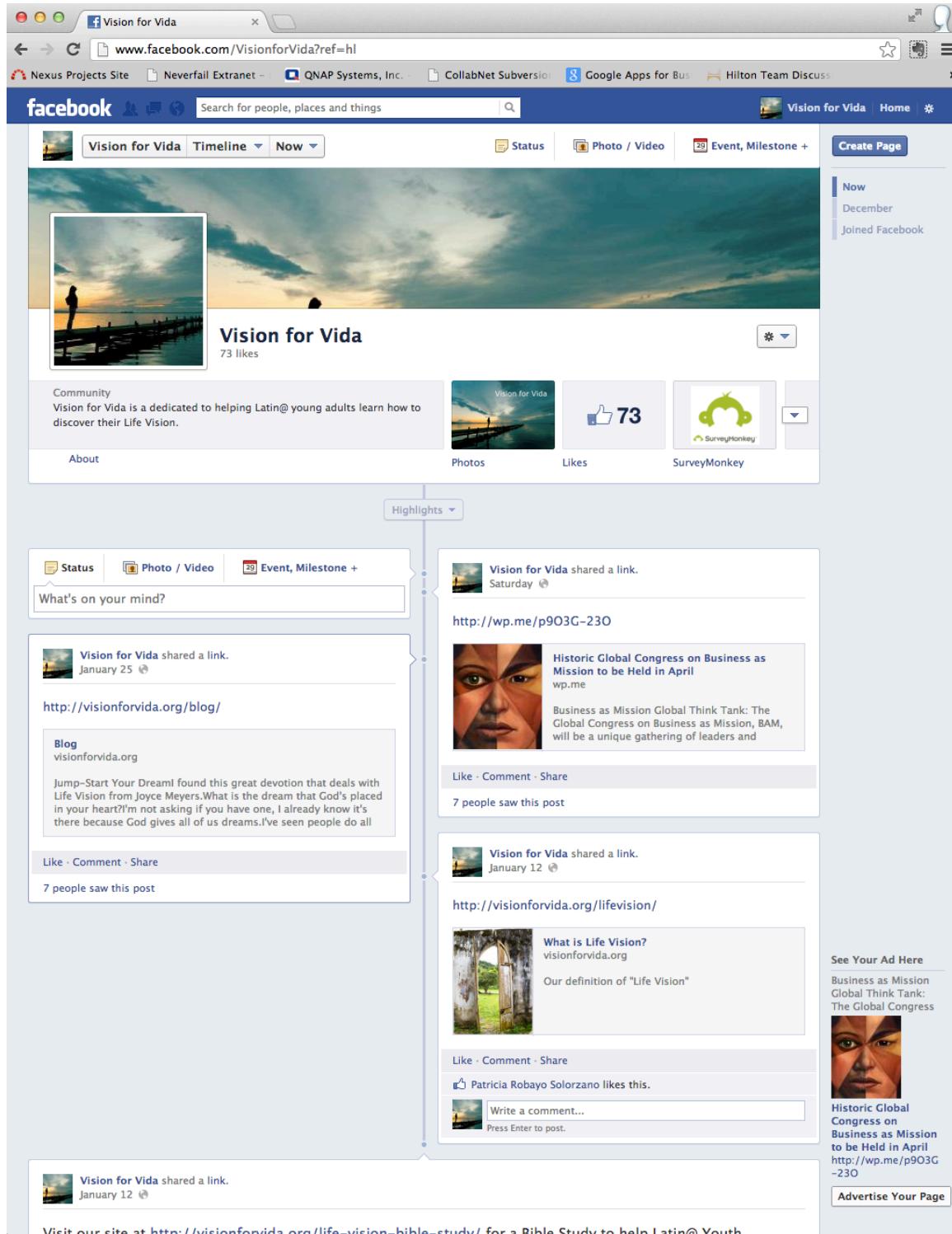
The instructor has the parent of each student stand by their respective student (If no parent is found have a member of the congregation fill in). Students repeat the Life Vision Pledge after Instructor.

Instructor has the students take one step forward. The instructor states:
“This is symbolic of the first step you have taken walking in your Life Vision. As God helps you continue to walk in it for the rest of your life.”

Closing Prayer for all the graduates.

APPENDIX 8

Vision for Vida Facebook Page



The screenshot shows the Facebook page for "Vision for Vida". The page header includes the page name, a profile picture of a person standing on a pier at sunset, and navigation links for "Timeline", "Now", "Status", "Photo / Video", and "Event, Milestone +". The main content area features a large image of a sunset over water with a pier. Below the image, the page name "Vision for Vida" and "73 likes" are displayed. A "Community" section describes the page as dedicated to helping Latin@ young adults learn how to discover their Life Vision. To the right are links for "Photos", "Likes" (73), and "SurveyMonkey". A "Highlights" section displays recent posts:

- Vision for Vida shared a link.** Saturday
<http://wp.me/p9O3G-230>
Historic Global Congress on Business as Mission to be Held in April wp.me
- Vision for Vida shared a link.** January 25
<http://visionforvida.org/blog/>
Blog visionforvida.org
Jump-Start Your Dream! I found this great devotion that deals with Life Vision from Joyce Meyers. What is the dream that God's placed in your heart? I'm not asking if you have one, I already know it's there because God gives all of us dreams. I've seen people do all
- Vision for Vida shared a link.** January 12
<http://visionforvida.org/lifevision/>
What is Life Vision? visionforvida.org
Our definition of "Life Vision"
A photograph of an arched doorway.

On the right side, there are sections for "See Your Ad Here" (with a link to the Global Congress) and "Advertise Your Page". A sidebar on the right shows a profile picture of a person's face and a link to "Historic Global Congress on Business as Mission to be Held in April".

APPENDIX 9

Vision for Vida Twitter Page

The screenshot shows the Twitter profile page for **Vision for Vida** (@visionforvida). The profile picture is a sunset over a bridge. The bio reads: "Vision for Vida is dedicated to helping Latin@ young adults learn how to discover their Life Vision. New York - visionforvida.org". The stats are 9 tweets, 9 following, and 4 followers. The sidebar shows "Who to follow" with users like Veterans United, Chris Brooks, and 20/20Vision 4Schools. It also shows trends like #Timeto365, #JaiFollowMeYouPeasant, and #beaufollowmeyouworm. The main feed displays several tweets from the account, including one from Rick Warren (@RickWarren) and one from Joyce Meyer (@JoyceMeyer). The footer links to Twitter's 2013 terms of service.

Tweets

Who to follow

Trends

Vision for Vida @visionforvida

Vision for Vida is dedicated to helping Latin@ young adults learn how to discover their Life Vision. New York - visionforvida.org

9 TWEETS 9 FOLLOWING 4 FOLLOWERS

Tweets

Vision for Vida @visionforvida 26 Jan

Historic Global Congress on Business as Mission to be Held in April wp.me/p9O3G-230

Vision for Vida @visionforvida 21 Jan

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed... Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Rick Warren @RickWarren 19 Jan

You are saved FOR something, not just FROM something. [#SavedToServe](#) Eph.2:10

Vision for Vida @visionforvida 18 Jan

God's as interested in the process of vision as He is in the end result. - Joyce Meyer

Vision for Vida @visionforvida 17 Jan

I refused to let my belief systems brought on by the lies of the enemy keep me from my God-appointed destiny. [@drlizrios](#)

Vision for Vida @visionforvida 14 Jan

People with purpose are powerhouses of possibility - Motivational Memo

Vision for Vida @visionforvida 8 Jan

... hold fast to dreams for if dreams go, life is a barren field frozen with snow - Langston Hughes

Vision for Vida @visionforvida 8 Jan

APPENDIX 9

Vision for Vida Web Site

Vision for Vida

visionforvida.org

Nexus Projects Site Neverfail Extranet QNAP Systems, Inc. CollabNet Subversion Google Apps for BUS Hilton Team Discuss

VISION FOR VIDA

Helping Young Adults Cast a Vision for Life...

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Twitter Feed

 Historic Global Congress on Business as Mission to be Held in April <http://t.co/vfk6PWxe> about 3 days ago

 I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed... Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. about a week ago

 RT @RickWarren: You are saved FOR something, not just FROM something. #SavedToServe Eph.2:10 about a week ago

[Follow @visionforvida](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

 Vision for Vida

Dear Leader/Pastor:

"Vida" is the Spanish word for life, but have you noticed a growing trend among many Latin@ young adults? They feel stuck. They don't have any idea of what the future might hold for them. Many of the youth we serve have made a real commitment to Christ and regularly attend church and our youth groups, but somehow their faith is not empowering them to see the endless possibilities and the potential that God has placed in them. It would seem that they have no "vida". They have no desires or aspirations toward a calling and career. More importantly, they lack a passion, dreams or goals for their life. They are in need of vision for their lives. Jesus said:

"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

— John 10:10

The enemy is stealing the plans and the destiny of our young adults. As a leader, you can help them begin to consider how they were designed by their creator. You can help them discover their God given passion. Imagine young Latin@s finding their unique purpose in this world. Our churches and our communities would never be the same. The church can play a pivotal role in the lives of our young adults by leading them toward Life Vision. By teaching our youth to seek Life Vision from the source of all life they will be able to walk in the future God intended for them.

An important resource you can use is the [Life Vision Bible Study](#). This study is meant to help leaders and Pastors spend time with young adults and lead them to finding their Life Vision. This is vital to our strategy for leading young adults to Life Vision. Click "Resources" on the left panel.



Squarespace – Configuration Life Vision Bible Study — Vis

visionforvida.org/life-vision-bible-study/

Nexus Projects Site [Neverfail Extranet](#) [QNAP Systems, Inc.](#) [CollabNet Subversion](#) [Google Apps for BUS](#) [Hilton Team Discuss](#)

VISION FOR VIDA

Helping Young Adults Cast a Vision for Life...

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Twitter Feed

 Historic Global Congress on Business as Mission to be Held in April
<http://t.co/vfk6PWxe>
about 3 days ago

 I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed... Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
about a week ago

 RT @RickWarren: You are saved FOR something, not just FROM something.
#SavedToServe Eph.2:10
about a week ago

Life Vision Bible Study



Joseph Dominic Photography

This study will allow you to start a conversation about Life Vision with your young adult or youth group. Do the study for yourself first to be able to bring meaningful discussion to the group you lead. It is meant to be done in a small group setting but it can be done in larger groups using break out sessions with group leaders. The idea is that all students will feel free to share in the space they are in.

[Life Vision Instructor Version \(Last revised 1/9/2013\)](#) - Instructor workbook.

[Life Vision Student Version \(Last revised 1/9/2013\)](#) - Student workbook.

Please feel free to ask any question in the forum entitled [Feedback for Life Vision Study](#).

Life Vision Sermons — Vision for Life

visionforvida.org/life-vision-presentations/

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Life Vision Sermon Powerpoint Presentations

The following are Life Vision Sermons in powerpoint format. They can be preached or taught. Feel free to use them to introduce the concept of a Christian Life Vision to your church and youth or young adult group. Modify them for your own use.

Bendiciones, Pastor Luis Alvarez

[Life Vision Sermon for Young Adults](#) - The Sermon introduces Life Vision to Young Adults

[Life Vision How?](#) - Steps on how do obtain a Life Vision.

[Life Vision Sermon for All](#) - This sermon is intended to introduce the whole church congregation to Life Vision. Life Vision is for everyone at any season of their life.

[Life Vision for All \(Spanish\)](#)

[Life Vision for Family](#) - How do you have a Life Vision for your family?

[Life Vision for Family \(Spanish\)](#)

[You Are Blessed to be You \(Bilingual\)](#) - A sermon on understanding the blessing of your heritage.

 Joseph Dominick Photography

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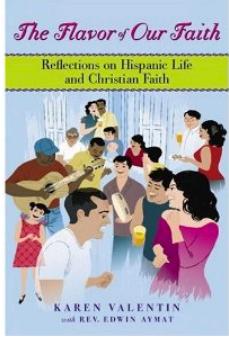
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The Flavor of Our Faith
By José Humphreys

 *The Flavor of Our Faith*
Reflections on Hispanic Life and Christian Faith
KAREN VALENTIN and REV. EDWIN AYMAT

The Flavor of Our Faith by Karen Valentin, is a series of inspirational reflections, and *cuentos* (stories) about the experience of growing up Puerto Rican and Christian in New York. With humor and wit, the book recounts an array of childhood experiences that many Latinos and non-Latinos, from a "traditional" background can relate to. One chapter in particular was titled, "Nuyorican Spanish", the story of her Puerto Rican born parents speaking to her strictly in English, for fear she would not grasp the language. This is the experience of many second generation Hispanics who in their quest to re-learn the Spanish language, wrestle through "Spanglish." There was also a story about her pilgrimage to Puerto Rico, titled "Island of Coffee and Milk", where she traveled and found herself bored and uninspired, only to return later and appreciate her heritage all the more. Though from a Puerto Rican perspective, Karen Valentin relates stories about other Latino experiences she is familiar with, touching on themes like immigration and the negative affects of legalism on our Christian identity.

The Flavor of Our Faith is an inspiring intersection between Hispanic faith and culture. I felt a sense of fellowship and familiarity with the experiences as they were re-told. It's one of those books I envision people of any culture huddling around, as they reminisce over their mix of cultural and religious experiences, while finding a sense of comfort with the turn of each page.

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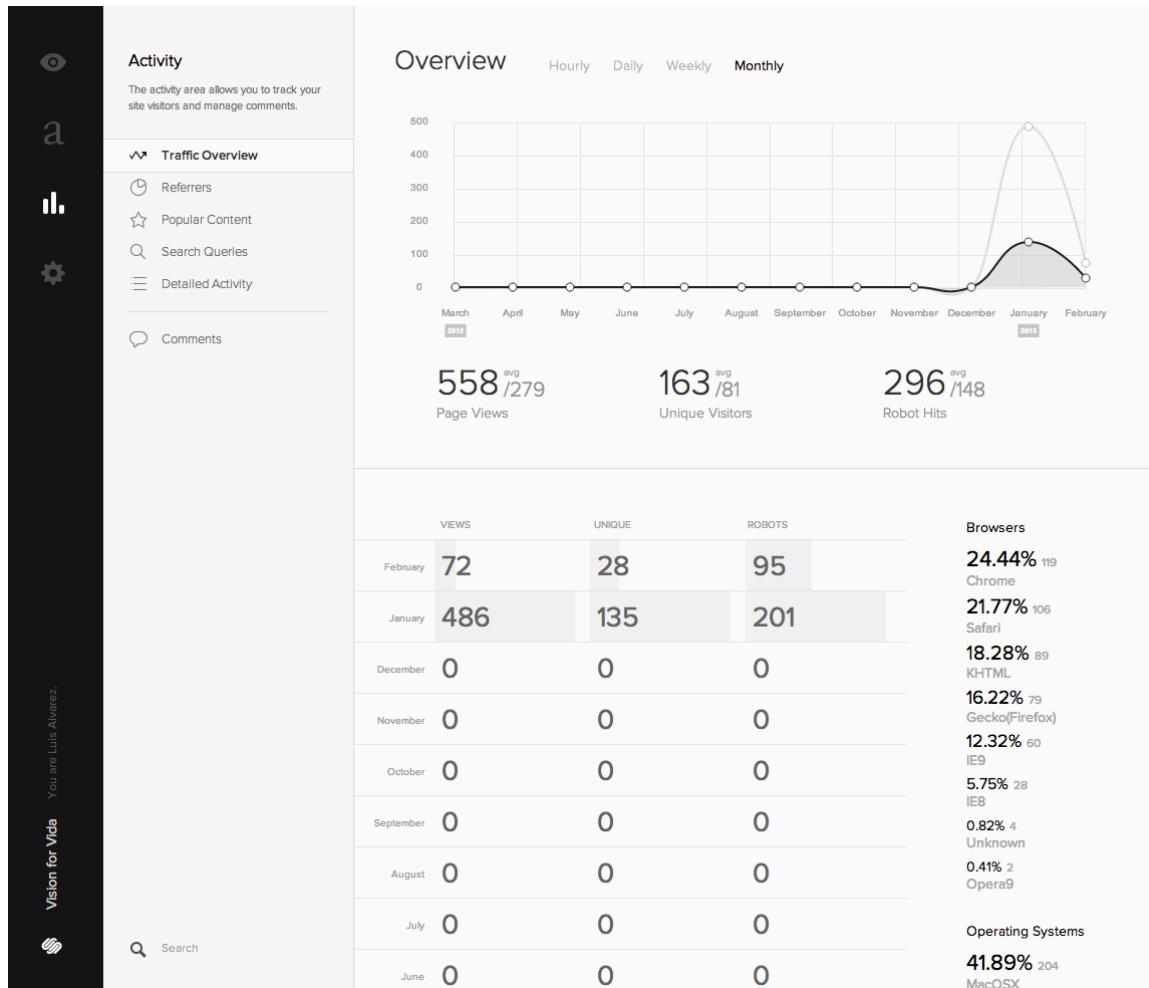
Jump-Start Your Dream
I found this great devotion that deals with Life Vision from Joyce Meyers.

What is the dream that God's placed in your heart? I'm not asking if you have one, I already know it's there because God gives all of us dreams.

I've seen people do all kinds of things to their dreams. Some people bury them so deep in their hearts in order to protect them from the criticism of others. Some people set them out of sight so they don't have to think about them anymore. And some people finally just give up on their dreams because it hurts too much to hold on.

APPENDIX 10

Vision for Vida Site Statistics



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